

The convergence of National Education Policy (2020) and Rights of Persons with Disability Act (2016): Implications for Inclusive Education

Sneha Dabral¹, Dr. Anusuya K. Yada²

E-Mail Id- snehadabral08@gmail.com,

¹Student M.Ed. Special Education (Learning Disability), Amity Institute of Rehabilitation Sciences, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh

²Assistant Professor, Institute of Rehabilitation Sciences, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract:

Education is a fundamental right and the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has revolutionized the Indian education system. While previous policies focused on rote learning and teacher-centred approach, the NEP (2020) emphasizes equity where “one size does not fit all”, catering to the individual’s learning needs and tailored teaching-learning process. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) aligns with the global moralities of the rights of persons with disabilities. It promotes educating and empowering individuals with special abilities. Together NEP 2020 and RPWD 2016 form a robust framework to support the needs of learners across India. Both policies emphasize that every learner is included in the education system despite their socio-economic status and disabilities. This collaboration nurtures individuality, supports pupils, fosters acceptance among peers and actively promotes inclusive education. The present paper discusses how the union of National Educational Policy 2020 and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 align to point toward inclusive education in Indian education system. The systematic review of the national and international studies was taken and the finding suggest that, this alignment of NEP 2020 and RPWD 2016 stresses the accommodation of the diverse learning needs along with that it advocates for the educational reforms to encourage school centric education. It also has provision for teacher training and skill development to cater to the diverse learners in 21st century. This paper focus on the convergence that will ensure the elimination of the barriers faced by learners and educators in the teaching learning process and will ensure that learners will reach their full potential.

Key Words; National Education Policy 2020, Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016, Inclusive Education, and Convergence.

Introduction

The Indian Education system has seen many twists and turns beginning from the era of *Gurukul* education to *Madrassa* and from there to British colonial rule which focused on structured formal education having a systematic course curriculum. This transformation of education also goes hand in hand thru social exclusion where disabled people were denied the right to live, to the direction of present scenario of inclusion where utmost care is taken to include every individual despite their disability, socio- economic status, and diverse cultural background. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act (2016) came as a result of United Nations Convention for Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006). The RPWD act 2016 is a comprehensive act which added rights and entitlements, education, skill development, rehabilitation, recreation, special courts and funds for persons with disabilities. RPWD act 2016 broadened the perspective of disability and gave recognition to 21 disabilities promising that the persons with disabilities are seen as *self-sufficient* individuals, not an object of misfortune. Providing them with quality treatment in society which promotes a sense of belongingness. This act has laid down guidelines for reservations of persons with disabilities in education sector and penalties if the rules are violated. In education sector, it ensures that educational institutes have necessary provision for accommodation for the students with disabilities. The National Education Policy (2020) (NEP 2020) has revolutionised the Indian education system by addressing the diverse learning needs at every level of education. The provision of individualized program, flexible curriculum and training programs for teachers in the field of special education, makes NEP 2020 one of the robust policies of Indian education system so far. The motive *One size does not fit all* has made transformations ensuring that every student irrespective of their disability, diverse cultural background and socio-economic status receives education under one roof with children of his/ her age as per their learning pace. This has made its way to barrier free educational environment and inclusion. RPWD act 2016 and NEP 2020 together form a robust framework for the education of the persons with disabilities. Both policies focus on holistic approach to see disability as a *special* ability from the perspective of society as a whole. The RPWD act 2016 allows the learners to choose their mode of study (inclusive school, special school and home-based learning) in addition NEP 2020 provides learners with reforms such as extended time during exams, exemptions/concessions such as scribe facility, flexible subject choices and alternate questions/question paper. The provision for the education of teachers in the disability sector is a leap towards inclusive education. The training programs sensitise the teacher to the needs of learners in classroom henceforth helping the teachers to easily navigate through the challenges faced by learners in the teaching learning process. The alignment of the RPWD act 2016 and NEP 2020 fosters a collaborative teaching- learning environment where the needs of the learners with varying abilities are met effectively.

Review of literature: -

Soumya and Navita (2020), mentioned that mainstreaming of education of children with disabilities has a long journey. Through a systematic review of literature, they emphasise on the educational policies that have made education accessible for all.

This paper indicates that inclusion and inclusive education should not just be in papers but there should be implementation of the policies at the ground level. The study showed that a shift is still needed to view disabled people as having special abilities. The focus should be on the achievement of the individuals rather than their disabilities. This will require a dynamic shift in the mindset of the general population. The NEP 2020 promises education of all children of despite their gender, background and disability. It promises the accommodation and modifications not just in the curriculum but also in the infrastructure and the attitude of the teachers. This paper states that the approach of the NEP 2020 and RPWD 2016 stresses on barrier free and non-discriminatory access to education for persons with disabilities. The recommendations given by RPWD act 2016 are fulfilled by NEP 2020 in terms of school complex, school education, the curriculum and the teacher training leading to equitable access to education.

Dhaval (2020) mentions that National Education Policy 2020 acknowledges educational rights of students with disabilities and have made modifications that were not present in the previous policies. Systematic review of literature reveals the emphasis of NEP 2020 on the need for infrastructural changes, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) and provisions for teaching Indian sign language and Braille at primary level education. The curriculum to be made by the collaboration of NEP and RCI with NCTE and NCERT will consult the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. The RPWD act 2016 offers free and compulsory education for persons with disabilities from 6-18 years enabling them for an equitable participation in educational institutes, provision of 5% reservation in higher educational institutes for students with benchmark disabilities and 5 years of age relaxation in job sector has paved its way to inclusion by providing quality education at the pace of the learner. The author recommends that the alignment of NEP 2020 and RPWD act 2016 will be of no use if changes are not made on the ground level.

Showkat and Saba (2024) mention the attainment of Sustainable Developmental Goal 4 to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and promote learning opportunities for all by year 2030. Every child has the right to education without any demarcation and differentiation. Systematic review of literature exposes hesitation of teachers to teach at primary level in an inclusive environment. Teachers view implementing inclusive education practices challenging. Easy access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is providing great benefit in cultivating the teaching- learning environment. The infrastructure of the educational institutions needs an upgrade. Education should not be a luxury for the Socio- Economically Disadvantaged Group and for the Children with Special Needs. Primary focus of implementing policy should be providing recognition to Individuals with Special Needs, creation of special educational zones, learning for all, technology-based tools and supportive devices and home education. The paper suggests that the implementations of the provisions will require man power including active participation of government agencies.

Avinash et al. (2023) discusses the provisions, implementation and consequences of the emergence of National Education Policy 2020 which breaks the conventional educational methods. The focus of the study is to assess positive impact of NEP 2020 for persons with disabilities in India. The highlight of the study is the advantages and challenges related with the policies' inclusive approach. To move towards inclusion, the role of society, teachers and technology plays a crucial role. The comprehensive role of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), universal access to education, flexible curriculum and assessment, teacher training and professional development, use of technology, community participation, diversity and multilingualism possess benefits for accessible education, flexible curriculum and teaching practices, availability of human resources and advocates, encourages the individual with disabilities to move towards independent living and empowerment. The author mentions that all this will only be successfully be achieved if there is continuous monitoring and evaluation at the ground level.

Findings and Conclusions:

Inclusive education is most significant aspect of the 21st century classrooms. It ensures full participation of children with disabilities in the curricular and co- curricular activities. RPWD act 2016 and NEP 2020 have focused on the mainstreaming of education for persons with disabilities. Education is the fundamental right of every citizen of the country. The International Scenario of inclusion began in 1948 with Universal Declaration of Human Rights and World Declaration for Education for all in 1990. The Indian scenario of inclusion began with Kothari education commission. The first education policy was introduced in 1968, it addressed the educational need of the handicapped children in mainstream schools. The Integrated Education for disabled children (IEDC) 1947, promoted integration of the children with mild or moderate disabilities in the regular schools. Amendments in Article 45 guaranteed free and compulsory education for the children of 6-14 years of age. The second education policy of India 1968, emphasized the admission of children with mild disabilities on regular school and moderate to severe in special schools. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992, regulated the training of rehabilitation professionals. The District Primary Education Program 1997 talks about school preparedness. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities act 2016, gave recognition to 21 disabilities making provisions for accessible learning environment for all. The National Education Policy 2020 covers all level of education providing equitable and inclusive education. NEP 2020 aligning with the RPWD act 2016 incorporates children with wide-ranging capacities into the current classes and structures inside a school enabling the learner to fit into a pre-existing model of schooling. Lack of teacher preparedness, lack of strategies to improve practical skill and competency development and pedagogy are barriers that hinder inclusive education. Teachers believe that accommodating learners with learning difficulties is challenging and disturbs the equilibrium of the classroom. To overcome this issue collaboration of NEP and RCI with NCTE provide B.Ed. training programs to teachers in the field of special education to teach children with disabilities, distinct interests and capacities.

Together the implementation of RPWD act 2016 and NEP 2020 focus on the attainment of the Sustainable Developmental goals 4: Quality Education. This begins by recognising the individuals with special needs. Both policies recommend creation of special educational zones, quiet zones, accessible school complex and home-based education. Fundamentals of RPWD and NEP 2020 like inclusive education, technology integration, community participation, teacher preparation, and accessible infrastructure determine *how* inclusive educational institutions are. Additionally, teacher training programs and community involvement are foundations of having an inclusive educational ecosystem. NEP 2020 leads to the establishment of support services, such as special educators, counsellors, and assistive technology, to address specific needs of students with disabilities. This can enhance the overall learning experience and provide assistance. The policy offers a thorough structure, efficient execution, resource allocation for acceptance of children with special needs in the mainstream schools and inclusive education.

The coalition of NEP 2020 and RPWD 2016 will be of no use if the implementation is unsuccessful. Hence, the government agencies like Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Union and State Governments, Ministry of Education, State Boards, National Testing Agency, the NCERT, SCERTs, schools, and Higher Educational Institutes must ensure that the policy is implemented in its true spirit.

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