

Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a barrier to inclusion in India: An analysis with reference to the National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract:

Inclusive Education is a revolutionary step of Indian Government for Children with Special Needs to going forward after traditional Special Education in Indian setting. The concept of inclusive education has gained notable attention in India, advocating for the integration of all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, or linguistic barriers, into general education. In India, the education system has long wrestled with challenges related to inclusive education, specifically for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The main objective of this article to analyse the concept of SEN as barriers to inclusion in the Indian context, with a particular focus on the policies of the NEP 2020. The analysis will look into the current ground reports: success stories and challenges of diverse states, policy gaps, and future strategies for impactful implementation to ascertain that children with SEN are fully integrated into the general education scheme.

Key words: Special Education Needs, Inclusive Education, National Education Policy 2020.

1.0.Introduction

India is a thawing pot of languages, culture, and experiences. Education, one of the most important pillars of a country, plays an effective role in shaping its future. India's educational system faces the dual challenge of serving to the general student population and on the other hand addressing the needs of students with disabilities. Traditionally, students with special needs have been educated in special education schools, which require significant budget and human resources. With the rise of inclusive education in India, there is a motion debate on the impactful cost savings and holistic benefits of integrating special needs students into mainstream schools.

This article aims to provide a detailed analysis of how SEN acts as barriers to inclusion in India's educational system. It will examine the historical context of SEN in India, the current state of inclusive education, and how the NEP 2020 addresses these challenges. The NEP 2020, which aims to transform the Indian educational system. However, the question remains: how effectively does it address the needs of students with SEN? This article explores this question by analysing the NEP 2020's provisions for inclusive education, assessing the challenges faced by children with SEN, and offering insights into the barriers that still exist in realizing true inclusion Implementation in Indian schools.

1.1 Inclusive Education and National Education Policy 2020

Inclusive education is highlighted on the principle that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, should learn together in a encouraging environment. This approach stressed the need to adapt the mainstream education system to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, rather than creating separate special schools for those with disabilities.

The NEP 2020 is a marker policy that want to improve the Indian education system. One of its key principles is inclusivity, with a specific focus on integrating children with SEN into mainstream education. The policy emphasizes the need for barrier-free entrance to education, assuring that children with disabilities should not left behind.

1.Sight of inclusion: The main vision of NEP 2020 is an inclusion. It highlighted the need to create an environment where every child, regardless of their socio-economic background or disability, can develop. The inclusive education is not just about physical entrance to schools but also about assuring the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and evaluation processes serve to the diverse needs of all students.

2.Curriculum and pedagogical: NEP 2020 highlighted flexible curriculum that can be adapted for the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. It embolden the utilize of technology to create inclusive learning environments and encouraging the training of teachers in inclusive pedagogy.

3. Infrastructure: The policy stresses on the improvement of the poor quality school infrastructure available to all students. This contains physical availability (ramps, accessible toilets) as well as learning materials in accessible formats (Braille, sign language).

4.Teacher training: The policy emphasize the importance of teacher training in inclusive education. It calls for the integration of inclusive education in teacher training programs, ensuring that educators are equipped with the skills to support students with SEN.

5.Assessment and evaluation: The NEP 2020 emphasis on holistic and flexible approach for assessment because traditional methods often fail to capture the individual abilities of children with SEN. The policy is the proponent of the use of formative assessments, which furnish continuous feedback and allow for the identification of learning gap and the provision of targeted support.

1.2 Understanding of SEN and Historical context in India

Special Educational Needs (SEN) refer to children who need any additional support due to diverse disabilities which affect their ability to learn on the same basis as their peers. This contains a broad range of conditions, such as physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory impairments (like blindness and deafness), speech and language disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders, and specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

These children often need adapted educational interventions, specialized teaching methods, and more resources to make their learning better.

The concept of inclusion in India has improved over time. Traditionally, children with disabilities were not provided with any formal education at all and often separated in special schools. The main idea of integrating these children into mainstream or regular schools began gaining absorption only in the last of the 20th century.

Major legislative developments such as the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act (1995), and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) place the foundation for acceptance the educational rights of children with disabilities. In spite of these legislative frameworks, the implementation on the ground or rural background has been crowded with challenges, it's creating barrier for an inclusive educational environment.

1.3 Barriers to Inclusion for students with Special Education Needs in Indian setting

NEP 2020 sets a quality vision as inclusive education, but on the other side the ground setting with various challenges started to act as barrier for inclusion for children with Special Education Needs in India.

1.3.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

The significant barriers to inclusion in India is the deep-seated socio-cultural stain connected with disabilities. In spite of legislative measures and awareness operations, children with disabilities often face discrimination or narrow-mindedness and social exclusion. This stain expands to the education system, where children with SEN are sometimes seen as a burden on the society or family, leading to their exclusion within schools.

In our society, parents of children with SEN are unwilling to take admission of their children to school due to fear of discrimination or lack of awareness about their rights. Many parents in India have narrow- mindedness about disability. This results in a big number of children with SEN being out of school, particularly in rural background.

1.3.2 Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers inside in the education system itself create worthy of attention challenges to inclusion. These include:

- **Lack of Schooled Teachers**

Despite the stresses on teacher training in the NEP 2020, the ground reality is that many teachers in India are not enough quality trained to support children with SEN. The old teacher education curriculum has failed to care of the needs of children with disabilities, resulting in a ground workforce that is impotent to Implementation of inclusive practices.

Furthermore, the shortage of continuing professional development opportunities for teachers. It shows that even those who have skilled some training may not have entrance to the updated tools and techniques needed to support children with SEN effectively. This lack in teacher training is a major barrier to achieving the targets of inclusive education in India which outlined in the NEP 2020.

- **Inadequate Infrastructure**

The poor quality of infrastructure is visible in rural background school in India. The implementation of inclusive education need noteworthy budget in infrastructure and resources. Nevertheless, many schools in India, fundamentally in rural areas, shortage of the basic facilities needed to support children with SEN. These include approachable classrooms, assistive devices, and specialized learning materials.

In addition, the lack of sufficient budget for inclusive education programs means that many schools are not able to supply the necessary support services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and counselling, which are important for children with SEN. This shortage of resources reaches as a notable barrier to the effectual implementation of inclusive education.

- **Rigid Curriculum and Assessment Practices**

The old Indian education system is specify by a rigid curriculum and systemize assessment practices, which often stop working to accommodate the diverse needs of children with SEN. Despite the NEP 2020's stresses on flexibility, the implementation of these updates on the ground has been not good.

Children with SEN mostly struggle to keep up with the demands of the mainstream or general school curriculum, leading to frustration and separation. Moreover, the focus on systemize testing as the primary means of assessment stop working to capture the unique or individual abilities and progress of children with SEN.

1.3.3 Policy and Implementation Barriers

While the NEP 2020 furnish an authentic policy framework for inclusive education, the implementation of these policies inhabits significant challenge. various factors contribute to this:

- **Inconsistent Implementation Across States**

In our Indian constitutional body education is a state subject, meaning that the implementation of the NEP 2020 is separately across different states. This absurd can lead to enequality in the availability and quality of inclusive education system services. Some states may prioritize inclusive education, while others may lag behind due to political reasons or something else, At the end, resulting in unequal entrance to education for students with SEN.

- **Lack of Monitoring and Accountability**

There is often a shortage of impactful monitoring and onus structure to certify that inclusive education policies are being implemented as intended. Without appropriate oversight, schools may fail to execute to the guidelines which frame out in the NEP 2020, leading to gaps in the management of inclusive education.

- **Limited Funding**

The implementation of inclusive education policy needs significant financial resources. Though, budget for inclusive education is often insufficient, leading to a shortfall in the important infrastructure, schilling, and support system. Without sufficient budget, the targets of the NEP 2020 cannot be realized.

1.4 Ground Studies: Challenges and successes in Inclusive Education in India

To understand the real impact of SEN barriers and the potential of the NEP 2020, it is important to examine some real-life examples and ground studies from different parts of India. Surprisingly, only four studies appear to have systematically investigated on the ground realities and issues in India to date. The studies conducted by Sharma(2001), Bhatnagar (2006),and Sharma, Moore and Sonawane(2009),Rina Shah(2016) accentuate that in order for inclusive education programmes to be successful, it is crucial that the needs and concerns of educators be identified and systematically addressed.

- **Inclusive Education in Kerala**

Kerala is one of the popular states of India for inclusion education achievements. In Kerala overall school dropout is very low. The state has developed a ideal model of inclusive education by providing necessary support to the children with SEN for integration into mainstream. Kerala's education system provides specialized training for teachers, individualized education plan (IEP), and identification. The government has invested money on infrastructure and assistive devices for students.

In the inclusive education Kerala's Model is considered as a successful one. It reflects that with the good policies, training, awareness, law and resources, it is success to create an effective inclusive education system in India.

- **Inclusive Education in Uttar Pradesh**

In contrast to Kerala, many states in India are facing significant challenges in implementing inclusive education. Same situation in rural district of Uttar Pradesh. Poverty is clearly visible in the quality of inclusive education. Mostly schools often lack basic infrastructure (key issues). Inclusive education is at distance from local or rural areas, Not are enough numbers of quality teacher's, devices, High dropouts, low retention, indifferent attitudes of parents and communities are major concern for inclusion.

- **Inclusive Education in Delhi**

Delhi, as the capital city, has been at the forefront of implementing inclusive education policies. The Directorate of Education in Delhi has initiated several programs to integrate children with SEN into mainstream schools. These initiatives include the provision of special educators, resource rooms in schools, and the availability of assistive devices. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist. Many schools in Delhi still lack the necessary infrastructure and trained teachers to effectively support students with SEN.

Additionally, the large class sizes in government schools make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention to students with special needs. While the policy framework is in place, the implementation on the ground often falls short, highlighting the gap between policy and practice.

- **Inclusive Education in Gujarat**

In the local context of Gujarat Implementation of inclusion is a big concern comparatively Delhi or Kerala. The most educators in Gujarat probably don't have greater awareness and knowledge regarding inclusive education laws and policies in comparison of educators of Delhi or Kerala. In addition, researchers indicate that when teachers have knowledge about laws and regulations related to inclusive education, it reduces their concerns. Teachers in inclusive school and special school are not trained enough to identify or support children with SEN, as a result, many children in rural areas remain out of school or drop out early.

- **Inclusive Education in Bihar**

Bihar, one of India's most populous and economically disadvantaged states, provides a mirror example of these challenges. Poverty of education is clearly visible in village schools from the infrastructure to teaching learning materials and from presence – absence of specialized children to the presence of enough Special Educators. The education system in rural Bihar is facing basic infrastructure, accessible facilities. In the ground reality, the parents' words are that after spending five to eight years in school, their child are rarely better in their outcomes. So, at the end there is a high dropout in the education.

1.5 Conclusion

Historically policies always guided us towards inclusion with the constitutional view. From the Kothari Commission to the National Education Policy 2020. The NEP 2020 represent milestone in this journey as it stresses on the importance of addressing all the diverse learners along with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

However, In the big visionary picture of India the implications of inclusion is facing lot of trouble in ground reality check. Inequalities between urban and rural areas, lack in quality teacher training and disgrace associated with disability all accommodate to the marginalization of children with SEN. India to make inclusion on ground reality require efforts from all stakeholders, including the government, parents, teachers and community. At the end, the success of the policy will be measured by its ability to transform these ideas into reality. This requires continuous efforts not only from Special educators but General educators also have to make efforts for inclusion. Only than India can truly achieve an inclusion milestone.

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