



## Equitable and Inclusive Education in National Education Policy 2020

**Dr. Shalini Gupta**

Assistant Professor, Bachelor of Education

Bhavan's Leelavati Munshi College of Education, New Delhi, India.

Email - shalini6parmar@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Inclusion means ensuring access and learning for all children: especially those who have been excluded from the educational system due to linguistic, ethnic, gender, geographic or religious minority, or because of economically disadvantaged background as well as children with special needs including those with disabilities. NEP 2020 locates inclusion as a part of the wider reform of the education system, which aims to create learning environments that are responsive to all learners' needs and conducive to successful educational outcomes, and ultimately to a more equitable society. It goes beyond the education system to the communities in which learners live to ensure that they are welcomed, nurtured and given the opportunity to thrive to their optimum capacities. This paper tries to discuss the implementation strategies in light of recommendations given by NEP 2020. The paper tries to highlight some of the measures which could result in the effective implementation of the policy for equitable and inclusive education.*

**Key Words:** *Inclusive Education, NEP 2020, Equitable Education.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Every child has the right to quality education and they should be given equal opportunity to access education. No child should be excluded or discriminated in education on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, age, class or social group, religion, political, national, ethnic origin, poverty, disability, birth, or any other status. Changes should be made within the education system as well as in the society, so that child does not have to adapt according to the system. The educational system has to be made flexible in order to accommodate diversity in the learning community. All aspects of education, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, school culture and environments, should present opportunities for promoting inclusion. Diversity in the learners should be viewed as an opportunity and asset rather than a problem. Schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of fighting discrimination and building an inclusive society in which every child gets quality education.

Equity is fundamentally about fairness and means that '... personal and social circumstances... should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential'. Equity and inclusion are closely intertwined. According to UNESCO (2017), inclusive education is seen as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education." The goal of inclusive education is to build up an educational system in which teachers, students and all the personnel related to education should embrace the benefits of diversity. In an inclusive environment, all needs of learners are met and all learners have equal opportunities to participate and succeed.

In the past 20 years, India has seen increased rise in access to education due to increase in enrolment in elementary classes and reducing the number of out of school children. This has been possible only because of some key laws, policies and programmes like RTE Act, 2009, ECCE, 2013 and others. Still large number of children is not able to access schooling or drop out early. According to SRI-IMRB Survey, 2014, 29 percent of children drop out of school before completing elementary education. According to the Rapid Survey of Children 2013-14 MWCD, about 50 percent of children could not complete secondary education. According to National Achievement Survey, NCERT, 2017, nearly 50 million children are not able to achieve grade-appropriate learning levels. To meet all these needs and to bring reforms in school education at all levels, a strong national policy is needed which acts as a light towards an equitable and inclusive society by providing equitable and inclusive education.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS IN NEP 2020 :

New Education Policy 2020 is a big step in this direction. Policy highlights the importance and benefits of equitable and inclusive education in schools in chapter 6. The chapter discussed various reforms and schemes which



have tremendous potential to transform the Indian school education system as equitable and inclusive. Key recommendations of the Policy include

**Bridging gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes:** The policy recommends the educational system to aim to benefit each and every child so that no one loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of their circumstances- financial, social, linguistic or cultural. The policy took it as its one of the major goals to bridge the gaps due to access, participation and learning outcomes in school education. The Policy focussed on the socio-economically disadvantaged groups that have been historically underrepresented in education.

**Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)** can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socioeconomic conditions (such as migrant communities, low-income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor). NEP 2020

**Uplifting children from SEDGs communities-** Providing quality special hostels in dedicated regions to increase high-quality educational opportunities, constructing bridge courses to fill learning gaps, providing financial assistance through relaxation in fees and offering scholarships to meritorious students, giving cash incentives to parents for sending children to schools, giving bicycles to girl students and providing inclusion funds to the States. The policy suggested opening NCC wings in their secondary and higher secondary schools to harness the natural talent and unique potential of children from SEDGs and aspire them to make their careers in the defence forces. The policy also mentioned the use of measures that are proven to be effective for particular SDGs through research like providing a bicycle for girls is very effective.

**Inclusion Fund:** According to U-DISE 2016-17 data, about 19.6% of students belong to Scheduled Castes at the primary level, but this fraction falls to 17.3% at the higher secondary level. These enrolment drop-offs are more severe for Scheduled Tribes students (10.6% to 6.8%), and differently-abled children (1.1% to 0.25%), with even greater declines for female students within each of these categories. The decline in enrolment in higher education is even steeper. The policy recommends that all the schemes which will be designed for SEDGs should focus on girl students especially. The Government of India will constitute Gender Inclusion Fund to provide equitable quality education to girls and transgender students.

**Provisions for children with disabilities:** Children with disabilities face major hurdles in accessing quality education. The policy recommends the provision of appropriate infrastructure which will give equitable access. The policy also recommends the provision of resources like appropriate teaching-learning materials, assistive devices, technological support, special educators with cross-disability training and the establishment of resource centres. The policy also laid stress on the provisions for open schooling and homeschooling wherever required. It advocates provisions for early detection and provision for quality ECCE according to the needs of children. The policy highlighted the importance of awareness and knowledge of how to teach children with specific disabilities to all the teachers and stakeholders in the school.

**Flexible curricula to leverage each child's strengths:** NEP 2020 advocates flexible curriculum, teaching methods and assessment techniques according to the needs and strengths of all the children.

**Creating an ecosystem for appropriate assessment and certification:** Policy recommended constitution of assessment and certification agencies to formulate guidelines and tools for conducting assessments at all levels

**Teacher education programs:** The most important person in the implementation of policy is the teacher. The policy paid special attention to the training of teachers- pre-service as well as in-service. Policy stressed on providing training to teachers to deal with specific disabilities and work in inclusive setup. It emphasizes that gender sensitization and sensitization towards all SDGs should be an integral part of all teacher education programs.

**Support to alternative forms of schools:** To preserve the tradition and alternative pedagogical styles, the policy recommended providing support to alternative schools in integrating subject and learning areas prescribed by NCFSE into their curricula in order to increase their representation in higher education.



**Provision of single window system:** All scholarships and schemes should be made available to children belonging to SDGs by a single agency and website to ensure proper dissemination of information.

**Change in school culture:** The policy advocates change in complete school culture for the proper implementation of equitable and inclusive education. All personnel in schools- Principal, teachers, administrators, working staff, counsellors and students should be sensitized toward principles of inclusion.

The Policy gave a message that Every Child Matters Equally. The problem arises in putting this message into practice. Implementing this message will require changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system, from classroom teachers and others who provide educational experiences directly or indirectly, to those responsible for national policy. This Paper tries to provide some suggestions for the effective implementation of NEP2020. The policy has provided a vision for equitable and inclusive education which will lead to an inclusive society in the years to come. The most important aspect in translating this vision into concrete reforms is seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities to enrich learning. Differences can act as a catalyst for innovation that can benefit all learner.

Policy has covered all areas which are required for bringing equity and inclusion in education. Be it role of all stakeholders, community participation, infrastructure and resource management for equity and inclusion. It has provided detailed guidelines regarding curriculum, assessment and teacher education. Policy also talked about different provisions and incentives that should be given so that children are encouraged to seek education. To witness the efforts of policy in an effective manner each and every recommendation should be implemented in an effective manner.

### 3. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

To ensure the participation of all learners, all the stakeholders of education from policymakers to each and every individual who is involved in the education of children directly or indirectly, should believe in and work towards making it a reality. Equitable and inclusive education will become a reality only when reforms will take place at all levels.

#### Institutional Policy

Principles of Inclusion and Equity should lie at the heart of the policy of each institution so that all learners form positive social relationships with other members of the learning community and become fully participating members of it. All educators, professionals and personnel associated with the schools should ensure that the principles of inclusion are embedded in their vision and practice. Diversity in learners should be viewed and valued. Schools should have an inclusive orientation to remove discrimination, racism and exclusionary practices. Learners should be given the right to quality education with equitable opportunities to access education. They should be recognized for their unique learning potential that should be developed in the best conducive learning environment. Educational institutes should adapt to the learners' needs rather than the learner adapting to the education system. Teachers in the institution should be oriented and supported to engage with inclusive practices to enhance learning by providing different ways of engagement and representation of content. A differentiated curriculum that is based on a universal design of learning should be adopted to create a flexible curriculum through which it is possible to accommodate every learner within an inclusive learning-friendly environment. There should be the provision of collaboration and cooperation among different schools.

#### Infrastructure

The physical infrastructure of educational institutions should be modified to be fully accessible by every learner and should be properly equipped to enhance opportunities for all learners and should be built or modified on the principles of universal design. Equipment and assistive devices required for learning should be available to all learners according to their needs. Teachers should be oriented in assessing the potential of the learner and detecting early signs of difficulties. It needs to be ensured that appropriate support services are available to efficiently and effectively assess and provide strategies according to the needs of learners. These include School psychologists, Occupational therapists, and others. Special schools should act as resource centres for supporting regular schools. Special educators should be designated as resource teachers and should collaborate with regular teachers to provide their guidance, support and assistance.

#### Identification of barriers and their removal

Barriers in access to quality education result from the interplay of various factors involving political, social, cultural, and economic which determine how schools engage with children and families from these groups. Responding to these barriers requires planning. It is also necessary to empower school systems so that they work hand-in-hand with local communities, in order to identify and remove obstacles to learning and participation. Besides adapting features of



inclusion, schools need to be available to dismantle mechanisms and practices which are exclusionary in nature (Forlin, 2016). Once this multitude of barriers is identified mainstream education systems need to establish environments and a school culture that is barrier-free. In the education system, schools have to transform themselves into inclusive settings with a required shift from a 'one size fits all' educational model towards a socially just education that aims to increase the system's ability to respond to all learners' diverse needs. Schools should plan to find the gaps and bridge them by providing equitable support to the children. The NEP 2020 has provisions for special residential facilities and includes funds for children belonging to SEDs communities. Schools should work to make it a reality by optimizing the resources at their best.

### **Teaching Methods**

To make inclusion a reality in the classroom, methods and approaches used for individualization in special education cannot be transplanted. Rather approaches and methods used in inclusive settings should personalize learning through engagement with all the learners (Hart et al., 2004). All teachers should employ effective teaching approaches that are more representative of and responsive to diversity that foster a Universal Design for the Learning environment. Cooperative teaching and learning as a team approach should be encouraged. Teachers should work with learners and with other educators, parents and multidisciplinary professionals. Peer tutoring should be encouraged in which learners support each other. To support learning in inclusive settings, student participation in the classroom should be encouraged. There is strong evidence of the potential of approaches that encourage cooperation between students for creating classroom conditions that can both maximize participation and the standard of learning for all students (Johnson and Johnson, 1989).

### **Assessment Strategies**

In an education system, all students are assessed continuously for their progress. This allows teachers to respond to a wide range of individual learners. This means that teachers and other professionals must be well informed about their students' characteristics and attainments, while also assessing broader qualities, such as their capacity for cooperation. However, the ability merely to identify each student's level of performance or to enumerate certain students' particular difficulties is not enough. Teachers in inclusive systems need to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching for the range of their students and should know what they need to do to enable each student to learn. Thus, assessment in an inclusive setting should also focus on the curriculum, teaching methods and how every student can learn. Teachers need to have the skills to conduct assessments themselves; to prepare for this, they need ongoing professional development. They also need to find ways of working with special educators, psychologists, social workers and medical professionals. Teachers should use the assessments from these specialists for educational purposes.

Every child in school shall undergo continuous assessment. Assessment results should be shared with parents and mechanisms should be put in place for parents to seek a review. Multi-disciplinary assessment procedures should be established at all levels of education to meet the needs of all learners. Alternative assessment procedures shall be adopted in all educational institutions to respond to the diverse needs of all learners. All schools should undertake early identification, referral and intervention through periodic screening of all learners. At all levels, there should be regular monitoring and periodic assessment aimed at improving the child's chances to succeed. Examination procedures shall be adapted to the needs of students including the provision of extra time, and appropriate special assistance (sign language, scribes, and readers) as required.

### **Support Services**

All schools are supported through well-organised support structures that embrace shared cultures and values of diversity. Coordinated support structures within the education sector as well as between different sectors (mainly education, health and social services) in order to approach to facilitate linkage should be promoted. The role of support services is not to provide support for learners with individual needs but to provide support to parents/guardians, educators and schools. Support services of various personnel are required to gauge the gap between vision and practice. All personnel including special teachers, occupational therapists, doctors, and social workers need to work in cooperation with the common vision of providing equitable educational opportunities to different children according to their needs and hence maximizing their potential. They need to work with the parents and the community to make them understand their role and responsibility in making an inclusive society.

### **Curriculum**

Implementation of principles of equity and inclusion in the education system will be through the curriculum. Curricula for inclusion need to be flexible wherein students need not be at the same point in the learning process. They





should work at their own pace and in their own way, within a common framework of objectives and learning outcomes. The national curriculum throughout the education system shall be relevant and take into account the learner's cultural background, family, community resources, values, interests, aspirations, future goals and opportunities as well as systematically building their knowledge and skills to prepare them for life in the 21st century. The national curricula should provide scope for differentiations and adaptations to meet the unique needs of all learners including those with special needs.

### **Community Participation**

Educational change is technically simple but politically and socially complex (Fullan, 2007). Inclusion and equity may not be understood in contexts where people are used to segregated education provision. Therefore, it is necessary to spread awareness equity and inclusion. Parents and community members should be involved in the school related issues. Such engagement raises parents' awareness and provides an opportunity to all the children to participate fully in the educational system. Government and schools should encourage partnership between schools and members of civic society who can support and can own the process of change towards equity and inclusion. These members could act as social agents of change and should work towards mobilizing or spreading awareness among the community towards this vision. Families of children should be involved in the activities and overall functioning of the school. They should be made aware of the values and inclusive policies of the school. Where parents lack the confidence and skills to participate, supporting agencies should develop their capacity by creating parent support groups, training parents to work with their children and spreading awareness.

### **Training, Capacity Building and Professional Development**

Professional development is key to embracing change and is required in teacher training (both pre-service and in-service), continuous professional development for teachers as well as orientation, modular courses for other educational personnel (head teachers, school support staff), and related administrators at district and regional levels.

In an inclusive and equitable education system, all teachers need to approach the diversity among learners with a positive attitude. They should have a clear understanding and skills for inclusive practices. Teachers can acquire these skills during their pre-service training or through short, customized, in-service training. Research on teacher education for inclusive education has identified four core values that are required to develop teachers' competence in developing and sustaining inclusive practice:

1. Valuing learner diversity: Students' differences are viewed as a resource and an asset to education
2. Supporting all learners: Teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements
3. Working with others: Collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers
4. Continuing personal professional development: Teaching is a learning activity and teachers must accept responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

Embedding these values in teacher education programs can help empower teachers and support them in developing a wider range of responses to learners who experience difficulties in their learning. Being explicit about these values helps to establish the potential of teacher education to be a high-leverage activity in bringing about change. In relation to professional development under the policy, teachers should be equipped with pedagogical skills, and adequate knowledge of educational policies to meet the needs of children with special educational needs using child-centered approaches. The curriculum for pre-service training should be re-aligned to Inclusive Education Practices. Expert faculty for inclusive education should be appointed in colleges of education. The content of In-Service training should be strengthened to address the methodology for inclusion. All teachers should be trained in making their class environment more friendly, how to be role models in their dealings with the diversity in their classrooms, and how to ensure their students are non-discriminatory, open, supportive of each other, and respectful of each other. Teaching Practice / Internship should focus on inclusive practices and ideals. Exposure to teaching should be given to student teachers in inclusive settings. All student teachers should practice and experience teaching using a methodology that promotes the inclusion of all learners. Teachers should be trained in the initial assessment to identify learning difficulties among children and refer them for further diagnosis. Teacher education should include Disability Equality Training and also focus on specialization in areas of diversity e.g. multiculturalism, profound and multiple difficulties etc. to maintain and develop specialist human resources to support educators in the mainstream classes. In addition, training should also be given to all teachers in teamwork for full inclusion.

Special educators, who find the context and nature of their work changing in major ways, need ongoing professional development where they should be trained in mainstream classrooms and also in collaboration with other teachers.



In service, teacher development should take place primarily in classrooms, where practice develops. It should connect to and build on the expertise available within the school, making connections with existing knowledge. It should be able to create cooperative spaces where teachers can plan together, share ideas and resources, and have opportunities to observe one another working and engage teachers in developing a common language of practice that assists individuals in reflecting on their own ways of working, on the thinking behind their actions, and on how to improve. Sharing practices among colleagues is an effective means of encouraging teacher development. It is important to encourage teachers to collaborate with and support colleagues, to reflect on their practice and to build 'team' knowledge and skills.

Teacher educators should be given additional training in inclusion to boost their attitudes, knowledge and their practical skills so that they could deliver the training curriculum using appropriate pedagogy. This experience should give them a significant opportunity for personal reflection, debate, and for practicing the pedagogical skills needed for teaching an inclusive curriculum.

All other school personnel and relevant administrators at district, regional and national levels shall be oriented in inclusive education approaches and behaviours. Ensuring that organizational and school leadership teams are sensitized and trained to understand and respond to diversity in order to develop their leadership skills and vision in line with promoting inclusive values. The capacity of support services: resource teachers, assessment personnel, health workers, child protection workers, psychologists, and careers advisors to identify and work with learners with diverse needs and ensure that they are encouraged to perform to their full potential.

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

Inclusive Education ensures that the needs of all learners are optimally accommodated within the education system. NEP 2020 is the first and the most important step in providing equitable and inclusive education to each and every child. The implementation of the policy requires schools to transform their existing policies, pedagogical approaches, beliefs and attitudes. They need to redesign their processes and practices so as to respond effectively to the needs of all learners. To make it a reality, every member of society needs to modify their attitude and beliefs. This will make India an equitable and inclusive Nation.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Florian, L., Black-Hawkins, K., and Rouse, M. 2016. Achievement and Inclusion in Schools, 2nd ed. London, Routledge
2. Fullan, M. 2007. The New Meaning of Educational Change, 4th ed. New York, Teachers College Press
3. Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M.J. and McIntyre, D. 2004. Learning without Limits. Maidenhead, Open University
4. Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R. 1989. Learning Together and Alone: Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Learning. Boston, MA, Allyn & Bacon.
5. Ministry of Education, Ghana (2017) : Inclusive Education Policy
6. Ministry of Education, India (2020): National Education Policy, 2020
7. Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta(2019): A policy on Inclusive Education in schools- Route to quality education.
8. Promoting Inclusion and Equity in Education: Lessons from International Experience
9. UNESCO (2017): A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education

#### Web References:

1. Mel Ainscow (2020) Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 6:1, 7-16, DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587

**Author's Biography:** Dr. Shalini Gupta is presently working as Assistant Professor in Bhavan's Leelawati Munshi College of Education, New Delhi, India. She has done her Ph.D in Inclusive Education and Masters in Education and Zoology from University of Delhi. She has been teaching in Colleges of Education since 2005. She has done research projects with UNICEF, Patna and NCERT.