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Inclusive Education in Light of NEP 2020

Ms SARIKA, Research Scholar, Faculty of Education, M.G.K.V.P., Varanasi
Dr. RAMA KANT SINGH, Professor & Head, Faculty of Education, MGKVP, Varanasi

ABSTRACT

Education is the key to human development. It is a great leveller, social mobilizer and emancipator. It works as a catalyst in bringing social changes and is fundamental for achieving full human potential. An inclusive, equitable and just society, promoting economic prosperity and national harmony is the latest aspiration of young India which also aspires to become world's leading knowledge guru and global power player. With the rapidly changing global economic scenario and global ecosystem it has become imperative for rising India to go for a creative, multidisciplinary and innovative education system. An education system with highest quality, equity and integrity that thrust for character building of learners by enabling its learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate and caring as well as, preparing them for fulfilling purposeful gainful employment is key for a successful education system.

One of the methods of increasing the level of education among deprived /marginalised groups of the society is inclusive education. It is basically, policy intervention programmes by government and non-government entities to increase the representation of people who have historically had low representations in educational institutions. They are support programmes for bridging inequalities by providing equity, incentives, financial support and quality education. Inclusive education has especially gained importance because India has signed in 2015 at New York "U.N. Agenda for Sustainable development" that aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"

Key words: Inclusive education, NEP 2020, Equitable access, Quality learning, Diversity

Introduction: Children are future citizens of our country. They have ambition and dreams for their futures. All children need quality education to develop their skills and to realise their full potential. Second half of the 20th century opened a new thinking, new realisation, and new dimensions of education throughout the world. Every child is considered unique and important. Right to equality under article 14, 15 of the Indian constitution, Right to life and live with dignity without any discrimination under article 21, article 21-A, 86th amendment, 2002, RTE 2009 of the constitution support every child's right to get education, and right to receive help in learning it has own capacity. But unfortunately, children with disabilities and socially-economically marginalised and disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) were given less attention in policy making, thus, limiting their access to education and learning and their ability to participate in social, economic and political life. Mostly Children from this group remained out of schools. Those who went to schools, faced persistent barriers to education stemming from their being in SEDGs and contributed to large portion of school dropouts. Robbed of their right to learn and trapped in vicious cycle of poverty and hunger, these children later in life as adults often remained aloof from active participation in their communities, the work force and the decisions that most affected them.

Inclusive education is the most effective way to bring children from diverse groups and backgrounds to educational fold. It is a direct way of giving all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive in life. It allows the students of all backgrounds regardless of class, caste, creed, tribe, ethnicity, and socio-economic or physical condition to learn and grow side by side to the benefit of all. Children with varied backgrounds, learning styles, and physical and cognitive abilities are found in the classrooms and in the schools. It gives real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded - not only children with disabilities but deprived /marginalised groups, i.e. women and transgender, socially and economically disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities too . It advocates a change in the school culture that is sensitive to and responsive to the needs of all groups of children. Inclusive education system value the unique contribution students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side to the benefit of all

Inclusive education consists of: inclusion, mainstreaming and integration. Inclusion is the process of bringing children from diverse groups and exceptional children of whatever condition into the general classroom for their education. Mainstreaming is the process of bringing diverse groups children and exceptional children into daily contact with general children in an educational setting. Integrated Education flows directly from the recognition of equal rights for all citizens and equal education opportunities for all children. Integration is the process of bringing the part to the whole (the whole society) Integration is a practical solution to the problem of segregation or fragmentation of parts/ into parts. Education is thus designed to provide equal educational opportunities to all children and to prepare them for independent living like other members of the society.

Basically, it is an educational setting which promotes a healthy social relationship between the disadvantage and the general children as it reduces physical distance between them through equal participation in educational activities It Provides the least restrictive and most effective environment to the disadvantaged children so that they may grow and develop like other children. It is an arrangement in which every child is considered important and ensures civic rights of all. It solves the psychological problem of being disadvantaged that children of SEDGs often face. It is also the most viable approach to attend the goals of universalization of education and providing quality education to deprived and disadvantaged groups.

Inclusiveness is a slow process, and its impact is long term. An inclusive system requires changes and prior preparation at all the levels of society, especially the education system. At school/ college level proper infrastructure (like buildings), availability of study materials for students and trained teachers are needed. At community level, raising awareness and tackling discrimination, violence and abuse, and, at national level, government laws for supporting policies and programmes of inclusiveness are needed. An inclusive culture and a corresponding inclusive curriculum, inclusive pedagogy i.e. student centred learning are some of the basic requirements for the success of inclusive education.

Important components of inclusive education are: (1) Diversity in classrooms (2) Equitable Access and (3) Quality Learning

Diversity in classrooms: An inclusive education is a learning situation in which every student feels welcomed and cared of. Every student is unique and every group of students is different. Each student comes with her/his own set of experiences, cultures, beliefs and values. Therefore diversity in classroom comes, as, learning is carried out in an educational setting where students from different background and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. All students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate regular classes and are supported to learn contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. A successful Inclusive education happens by accepting, understanding and attending to student differences and diversity which can include physical or emotional, cognitive, academic, economic and social. This diversity can present challenges for teachers, students and

their parents. It can also create opportunities for growth and better connection in personal, social and academic achievements.

Equitable Access: Access to quality education and skill development must be equitable and inclusive for all children and adolescence, regardless of who they are or where they live. For achieving this, targeted effort is made to reach children who are excluded from education and learning on the basis of gender, disability, poverty and language. Educational support along with holistic integrated learner centred flexible and enjoyable pedagogy is provided to make access to education equitable.

Quality Learning: The diversity in classroom is challenging for teachers as well as students. On one hand it creates opportunities for growth, understanding and better connection in personal, social and academic achievements, on the other hand, diversity also demands acceptance of each other, adjustment, coordination and co-operation. Thus, quality learning takes place through safe friendly, inclusive learning environment with flexible, student-centred, interactive, discussion-oriented classes with the help of qualified and motivated teachers and instructions in languages that student can understand. Both knowledge and experiences are gained. Quality is maintained through monitoring educational out comes and feedback into instruction. To lessen the gap between what the students are learning and what they need to thrive in their communities/ society and future jobs, learning outcomes is monitored closely. All these help in quality learning.

UNICEF focuses on four key areas for promoting inclusive education:

- **Advocacy:** Promoting inclusive education through discussions, high level events and other forms of outreach geared towards policy makers and general public.
- **Awareness arising:** Arising sensitivity to the needs and requirements of children with disabilities, socially- economically deprived groups children and children from other diverse groups. “By conducting research and hosting round tables, workshops and other events”.
- **Capacity building:** Good infrastructure, “training teachers, administrators and communities and providing technical assistance governments” to tackle and handle the needs of students from diverse groups.
- **Implementation support:** Monitoring and evaluation to close the implementation gap between policy and practice.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 says that in a quickly changing global employment scenario and global ecosystem it is increasingly becoming necessary that education must move towards less content and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multi-disciplinary, how to be innovative and adaptive. In Today’s ever-changing fields of knowledge, there is need for absorbing new information and study materials in novel ways. There is also need for a holistic, integrated, enquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based flexible and enjoyable pedagogy.

“The purpose of education is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive and contributing [citizens for building equitable, inclusive and plural society] as envisaged in our constitution”. (National Education Policy, 2020, p. 4, 5)

“A good educational institution is one in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environmental exist where a wide range of learning experience are offered and where good physical infrastructure and proper educational resources conducive to learning are available

to all students. Attaining these qualities must be the goal of every educational institution". (NEP, 2020, p.4)

A good education institution is one in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, therefore a targeted effort is made to reach children who had been excluded from education and learning on the basis of gender, disability, poverty, ethnicity and language barriers

Some of the points highlighted by The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for inclusive education are following:

1) Equitable Access: The NEP 2020 envisions creating "an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high quality education to all" (NEP, 2020, p.6). It talks about providing "all the students irrespective of their place of residence a quality education system with particular focus on historically marginalized disadvantaged and underrepresented groups" it further recognises that education is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion and equality. It stresses that initiative should be taken to ensure that all students from SEDGs despite inherent obstacles are provided various targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system. Inclusiveness must be incorporated "taking into account the local and global needs of the country", (NEP, 2020, p.4) rich diversity and culture of the country.

2) Making Inclusive Environment: Making inclusive environment through diversity. Previous educational policies too had talked about issues of access and equity and pulling students from home and drawing them to schools. NEP, 2020, not only talks about bringing students from diverse groups and backgrounds to schools but also retaining them, so that they are able to harness their full potentialities. It talks about creating an inclusive environment at all levels of education, right from 'Balvatikas' to 'Higher Education'.

3) Quality Education: To make inclusive education practical and encourage holistic development of children reforms will be undertaken to bring flexible, student-centred, choice-based quality education system. Interactive classes, discussion-oriented classes, experiential learning classes for developing critical thinking, paying greater attention to life aspiration, discouraging rote learning and reducing examination pressure on students will be encouraged.

For bringing inclusiveness, NEP 2020 lays down guidelines for qualities of a good education system/institution as:

A good educational institution is one in which

- Each student feels that she / he is welcomed and cared for.
- Provides students from diverse backgrounds a safe and stimulating learning environment, a wide range of learning experiences, good infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students.
- That lays stress on recognising identify and fostering the unique capability of each student
- Sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student's holistic development.
- Flexibility so that learners are able to choose the learning trajectories and programs according to their talents and interests thus choosing their own paths in life.
- Promoting multilingualism and the power of language in teaching and learning.

- Extensive use of technology in teaching and learning, removing language barriers, increasing access for Divyang students, and educational planning and management.
- Respect for diversity and respect for the local Each student feels that they are welcomed and cared for.
- Equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.

Inclusive Education and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Early Childhood Care and Education:

Balavatika / preparatory-classes: Starting of Preparatory classes or Balavatikas to make children school ready. Education under 10+2 structure did not cover cores of young children falling in the age group of 3-6 years. Majority of the places in urban India have pre-nursery schools or play schools/ *prep-schools* catering to the educational needs of children of 3-5 years age group (data needs to be checked). But SEDGs children falling under this age group, hardly experience Pre-schooling (*prep-schools*). In order to provide all young children access to quality education, for foundational stage “Preparatory classes” or “Balavatikas” has been proposed under ECCE. NEP2020 says that, “It has been envisaged that prior to the age of 5 every child will move to a “Preparatory class” or “Balavatika” (that is for before class 1). There is advocacy for a strong investment in ECCE. These “Balavatika's” or preparatory classes will be attached to Anganwadis or primary schools. Mid-day meals programmes will be extended to them. Facilities like Health check-ups and growth monitoring that are available in Anganwadis will be available to preparatory classes or Balavatikas students too

To further ensure that all students are school ready an interim three month play -based school preparation module for all grade 1 students of Anganwadis.

Pre-school sections covering at least one year of early childhood care and education will be added to Kendriya-Vidyalaya and other primary schools around the nation particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Ashramshalas: In tribal dominated areas, ECCE will be introduced in ashramshalas in all formats of alternative schooling in a phased manner .

Preparatory and Middle class/ schools after foundation class:

Teachings in Home Language/Mother Tongue: Teachers having knowledge of local languages and teaching in home language, mother language, local language or original language will be deployed at all the schools. Till grades 5 and preferably till grade 8 teaching-learning will be done in home language/ mother language/ local language/ original language .This will be followed by both public and private schools. All efforts will be taken to bridge the gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching. Bilingual approach will be followed both in teaching as well as in preparing teaching-learning materials, especially, for science and mathematics so that students are enabled to think and speak about the two subjects both in their home language / mother tongue and in English

Equity through increasing the number of teachers: Teachers vacancies will be filled at the earliest. In order to enhance the quality and make school education more effective, in a time bound manner teacher

vacancies will be filled specially in disadvantaged areas. The disadvantaged areas or areas having more illiteracy, attention is to be given to employ local teachers or those with familiarity with local languages. In order to provide equity areas with large SEDGs will aim for PTR of under 25: 1 (standard norm being 30:1) Teachers will be trained encouraged and supported with continuous professional development- to impart foundation literacy and numeracy

Study Materials: DIKSHA will be provided with high quality resources on fundamental literacy and numeracy. Thus a national repository will be made available. In order to help teachers, technological intervention will be made and it will be piloted and implemented. This will help to bridge any language barriers that may exist during learning.. A high quality translated books in all local and Indian languages will be made available to students at all level. Digital libraries will be established. School libraries will be set up particularly in village to serve community during non-school hours. Peer tutoring, trained teachers and trained volunteers'-both from the local community and beyond help will be taken for the mission of attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy. National Book promotion policy will be formulated for ensuring availability, accessibility, quality and readership of books.

Equity through Health and Nutrition: Issues of health and nutrition will be addressed. In order to solve the problem of malnutrition and increase children's learning capacities, in addition to midday meal, nutritious breakfast will be provided especially to SEDGs children. This will enhance their cognitive ability. All children shall undergo regular health check-ups especially for 100% immunization in schools. Health cards will be issued and health check-ups will be monitored.

Curtailling Drop-outs and Ensuring Universal Access to Education, at all levels:

NEP 2020 proposes two initiatives to solve the problem of drop outs and bringing children back to schools.

- **Creating Adequate infrastructure:**
 1. Enlarging the schools that already exist,
 2. building additional quality schools in areas where they do not exist
 3. providing safe and practical conveyances and/ or hostels specially for girl children so that they get opportunity to attend the quality school at the appropriate level
- **Achieving Universal Participation**
 1. Students will be carefully tracked and so will their learning
 2. To those students who have fallen behind will be given suitable opportunities to catch-up. Dropped out will also be provided with opportunities to re- enter schools.
 3. Schools will have Counsellors or well-trained social workers from foundational stage through grade 12.
 4. To ensure that all school-age children are attending and learning in schools, teachers will extensively travel throughout communities and continuously work to engage with students and their parents to send their wards to schools.
 5. For empowerment of persons with disabilities Schools will be connected to appropriate level district and state level government functionaries for "Social Justice and Empowerment".
 6. In order to curtail drop-outs especially among girls of socially disadvantage groups, teachers having knowledge of local languages and teaching in home language, mother language, local language or original language will be deployed .This will be followed by both public and private schools. All efforts will be taken to bridge the gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching.

7. In local languages and regional languages high quality books will be prepared and language gap will be bridged in textbook materials.
8. Indian sign language will be standardized and national and state curriculum materials will be developed to support children with disabilities or hearing impairment.

Equity through Restructuring Curriculum and Reforming Pedagogy: After creating proper infrastructure and ensuring participation, curriculum and pedagogy will be redesigned from foundation stage onwards to make it more inclusive. There will be reduction in content and increased flexibility of school curriculum. By preparing a curriculum content that is strongly rooted in the Indian and local context and ethos in terms of culture, traditions heritage and customs, NEP 2020 proposes overhauling of curriculum to make it more engaging and useful to tackle with the problem of high dropout rates especially girls and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) . It proposes to broaden the scope of school education by facilitating multiple pathways to learning involving both formal and non-formal education modes .Open and distance learning programmes (ODL) will be expanded and strengthened to cater the learning needs of young people in India who are unable to attend physical schools. To encourage local variations and to allow alternative models of education, the requirements for schools will be made less restrictive. Bilingual approach will be followed both in teaching as well as in preparing teaching-learning materials. Text books will be made further inclusive All the text books shall contain the essential core materials deemed important of a national level plus at the same time they may contain supplementary material as per local context and needs. NEP 2020 further says that “schools and teacher will also have choices in the textbooks they employ- from among a set of textbooks that contain the requisite national and local material- so that they may teach in a time manner that is best suited to their own pedagogical styles as well as to their students and community’s needs” (NEP 2020, page 18). Availability of all text books in all regional languages will be top priority so that all students can have high quality learning. Indian sign language will be standardized and national and state curriculum materials will be developed to support the children with disabilities i.e., hearing impairment. Indigenous and traditional ways of learning will be encouraged. Efforts will be made to make Olympiad and competitions in various subjects available in rural areas and in regional languages to ensure wide spread participation.

Reforming Service environment for the teachers: Service environment for teachers and culture of the schools will be overhauled, to maximize the capacity of the teachers to do their jobs effectively. This will make them a part of vibrant caring and inclusive communities of teachers, students’, parents, principles and other supporting staffs. A decent and pleasant service conditions will be ensured at school. “Adequate and safe infrastructure including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces, electricity, computing devices, internet, libraries and sports and recreational resources will be provided to all schools to ensure that teachers and student, including children of all genders and children with disabilities, receive a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment and are comfortable and inspired to teach and learn in their schools.”(NEP, 2020, p.22).In collaboration with parents and other key local stakeholders teachers will be more involved in governance of schools or school complexes including as members of the school management committees or school complex management committees.”(NEP, 2020, P.21)

For creating positive learning environment principal and teachers will explicitly include developing a caring and inclusive culture at their schools. Teachers will be given autonomy in choosing aspects of pedagogy, so that they may teach in the manner they find most effective for students in their classrooms.

Rural inclusiveness: In rural areas special merit- based scholarship will be established. B.Ed. students will get preferential employment in their local areas upon successful completion of their B.Ed.

programmes. Local job opportunities will be provided to local students especially, female students so that these students serve as role models and as highly qualified teachers who speak local languages. “Incentives will be provided for teachers to take teaching job in rural areas especially in areas that are currently facing acute shortage of quality teachers.” (NEP, 2020, p.21)

To bring more local inclusiveness school complexes will be encouraged to hire local distinguished person or experts as master instructors in subjects like traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture or other subjects where local expertise exist to benefits students and help conserve and promote local language knowledge and profession.

Creation of Special Education Zones: For bringing equitable and inclusive education. educational zones will be created for regions having significantly larger portions of socially economically disadvantage groups children and where special interventions are required for promoting educational development.. These zones will be called “Special Education zones” and in these educational zones, all the schemes and policies will be implemented to the maximum. Every additional concerted efforts will be made to change their educational condition.

Gender-inclusion fund: For achieving equitable quality education, Gender-inclusion fund will be created for providing financial assistance to girls as well as transgender students. This fund will enable community based interventions that address local context specific barriers to female and transgender children access to and participation in education. This fund will help in removing the disparity in access to education, for children from any gender or other socio-economically disadvantage groups.

Educational schemes and scholarships: All schemes available to students, all scholarships and other opportunities for SEDGs will be coordinated and announced by a single agency and website. This will ensure that all the students are aware of and apply in a simplified manner on such single window system as per eligibility. Thus Equity through Financial Help will be created.

Boarding facilities: Free boarding facilities with suitable arrangements for girls and disadvantage groups will be built. These will have the facilities matching the standard of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, so that, students from far locations can avail it. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya will be strengthened and expanded. Additional Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas will be constructed.

Provision for Divyangs: In consonance with the provisions of Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD), children with disabilities will participate in the regular schooling process. Schools will be provided with resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross disability training and for establishment of resource centre. Barrier free access for all the children with disabilities will be ascertained as per RPWD act. Assistive-devices, appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language appropriate teaching materials will be made available to children with disabilities so that they may integrate more easily into classroom and engage with teachers and their peers. The awareness and knowledge of how to teach children with specific disabilities will be an integral part of all teacher education programmes.

Gender sensitization and sensitization towards all underrepresented groups: Gender sensitization and sensitization towards all underrepresented groups will become an integral part of teacher education programme.

Alternative forms of school will be encouraged to preserve their tradition or alternative pedagogical styles.

Conclusion: Thus, inclusive and equitable education is critical for achieving an equitable society where every citizen can dream, thrive and contribute to make her/his future. “No child losses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of birth or background.”(NEP, 2020, p.25). This reaffirms that bridging the gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes in education will continue to be one of the major goals of our educational development programmes. Developed Nations have already taken giant strides in terms of inclusion and accessibility; developing India too has set its foot towards “Education for All”. While accessible India, Digital India, marching ahead on the world stage as the fourth economic superpower, will become knowledge power too through education.

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