

National Education Policy, 2020

Equitable and Inclusion: Learning for All

Background Paper

For

Teacher's Fest



National Council of Educational Research & Training, Delhi

Equitable and Inclusion: Learning for All

1. Introduction

The Goal 4 (SDG¹) of the 2030 global Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

While the previous policies talked about access and equity, it was in National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 that Education for women's equality, Education of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and other backward sections, Minorities education and Education of the handicapped² were dealt as separate sections with separate provisions. The new education policy provides to all students, irrespective of their place of residence, a quality education system, with particular focus on historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups. It proposes that education is a great leveler and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality. It affirms that Initiatives must be in place to ensure that all students from such groups, despite inherent obstacles, are provided various targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system. It groups all these groups and also new groups under this chapter to provide better access to quality education.

Although the new policy suggests many fundamental principles that will guide the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within, the followings are the most relevant to inclusion of all children in education:

- **Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student**, by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student’s holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres;
- **Respect for diversity** and **respect for the local context** in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject;
- **Full equity and inclusion** as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system;

¹ Sustainable Development Goal

² The term was ‘handicapped’ was used in the earlier policies.

The policy has a number of sections and in each section equity and inclusion has been underscored. For better learning by all, the following box indicates the inclusion of diversity in different sections in the policy:

Early Childhood Care and Education: The Foundation of Learning

Schools providing quality ECCE reap the greatest dividends for children who come from families that are economically disadvantaged. Inclusion and equal participation of children from these groups and for children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system is of highest priority. Pre-school sections covering at least one year of early childhood care and education will be added to Kendriya Vidyalayas and other primary schools around the nation, particularly in disadvantaged areas. *“The overarching goal will be to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country in a phased manner. Special attention and priority will be given to districts and locations that are particularly socio-economically disadvantaged. ECCE will also be introduced in Ashramshalas in tribal-dominated areas and in all formats of alternative schooling in a phased manner.”*

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning

“The nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be addressed, through healthy meals and the introduction of well-trained social workers, counsellors, and community involvement into the schooling system. All school children shall undergo regular health check-ups especially for 100% immunization in schools and health cards will be issued to monitor the same.”

Curtailing Dropout Rates and Ensuring Universal Access to Education at All Levels

“For providing equitable and quality education from the Foundational Stage through Grade 12 to all children up to the age of 18, suitable facilitating systems shall be put in place”.

To facilitate learning for all students, with special emphasis on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), the scope of school education will be broadened to facilitate multiple pathways to learning involving both formal and non-formal education modes. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes offered by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools will be expanded and strengthened for meeting the learning needs of young people in India who are not able to attend a physical school”.

Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging

“All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. In cases where home language/mother tongue textbook material is not available, the language of transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language/mother tongue wherever possible”. Specific actions including the use of appropriate technology enabling children to work at their own pace, with flexible curricula to leverage each child’s strengths would be initiated.

Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country and National and State curriculum materials developed, for use by students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.

Teachers

“There is an urgent need for additional special educators for certain areas of school education. Some examples of such specialist requirements include subject teaching for children with disabilities/Divyang children at the Middle and Secondary school level, including teaching for specific learning disabilities”. Such teachers would require not only subject-teaching knowledge and understanding of subject-related aims of education, but also the relevant skills for understanding of special requirements of children. Hence, such areas as secondary specializations for subject teachers or generalist teachers, during or after pre-service teacher preparation could be developed. Certificate courses, in the pre-service as well as in-service mode, full time or as part-time/blended courses - again, at multidisciplinary colleges or universities will be offered. Greater synergy will be enabled between the course curriculum of NCTE and RCI to ensure adequate availability of qualified special educators who can handle subject teaching as well”

2. The Identities

In the Policy, Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) are 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 socio-economic 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). Details of the disability categories is given later.

3. The Goals

3.1 Addressing Dropout Rates

If we look into the data of Census, 2011, the disabled population constitutes 2.21% of the total population of India which was 2.13% in census, 2001 data. Rural (2.24%) residents are more as compared to urban (2.21%) ones as in 2001 data. Percentage of disabled persons in India has increased both in rural and urban areas during the last decade. Decadal increase in proportion is significant in urban areas.

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 while overall enrolments in schools decline steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 12, this decline in enrolments is significantly more pronounced for many of these SEDGs, with even greater declines for female students within each of these SEDGs and often even steeper in higher education.

The Census of India 2011, the Muslim population is 17.22 crore (14.23%), Christian 2.78 crore (2.30%), Sikh 2.08 crore (1.72%), Buddhist 84.43 lakh (0.70%) and Jain 44.51 lakh (0.37%). Data for Parsi (Zoroastrian) is not available, however, an article published in The Hindu titled "*Parsi population dips by 22 per cent between 2001-2011: study*" (26 July, 2016) cites that the total Parsi/Zoroastrian population in 2011 stood at 57,264 which was 69,601 in 2001.

3.2 Bridging Gaps and strengthening existing measures

Bridging gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes of children belonging to Scheduled Castes will continue to be one of the major goals. Also, the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) which have been identified on the basis of historically being socially and educationally backward also need special focus. Along with the existing intervention that will continue to be pursued, special mechanisms would be introduced to ensure that children belonging to tribal communities receive the benefits of these interventions. Minorities are also relatively underrepresented in school and higher education. The Policy will address these gaps by interventions to promote education of children belonging to all minority communities, and particularly those communities that are educationally underrepresented. The Policy also recognizes the importance of creating enabling mechanisms for providing Children with Special Needs (CWSN) or *Divyang*, the same opportunities of obtaining quality education as any other child.

3.3 Research

For providing effective and quality education to all children and especially those belonging to SEDGs, research would be conducted. Research will help to throw light on **Effectiveness of various provisions**, for example making provisions of bicycles for girl students or one-on-one teachers and tutors, peer tutoring, open schooling, appropriate infrastructure, and suitable technological interventions to ensure access can be particularly effective for certain children with disabilities.

4. Special Education Zones (SEZs)

Certain geographical areas contain significantly larger proportions of SEDGs. Also, there are locations that have been identified as Aspirational Districts by the Government which require special interventions for promoting their educational development. The Policy recommends that regions of the country with large populations from educationally-disadvantaged SEDGs should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape. Providing quality education to girls is the best way to increase the education levels for SEDGs, The policy thus recommends that the policies and schemes designed to include students from SEDGs should be especially targeted towards girls in these SEDGs to eliminate any remaining disparity in access to education (including vocational education) for children from any gender or other socio-economically disadvantaged group not just in the present but also in future generations.

5. Provisions

5.1 Gender-Inclusion Fund to provide equitable quality education and for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education through different mechanisms such as making provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc. will be available to States. This will enable States to support and scale effective community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers.

5.2 Inclusion Fund schemes will be developed to address access issues for other SEDGs. The Policy aims to eliminate any disparity in access to education (including vocational education) for children from any gender or other socio-economically disadvantaged group.

5.3 Building freestandard boarding facilitiesavailable in school locations where students may have to come from far, and particularly for students who from SED backgrounds with suitable arrangements for the safety of all children, especially girls.

5.4 Strengthening Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and expanding to increase the participation of girls in quality schools (up to Grade 12).

5.5 Building additional Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas around the country, especially in aspirational districts, SEDs, and other disadvantaged areas, to increase high-quality educational opportunities.

5.6 Special hostels, Bridge courses and financial assistance: As a part of the efforts to enhance participation in school education, special hostels in dedicated regions, bridge courses, and financial assistance through fee waivers and scholarships will be offered to talented and meritorious students from all SEDGs on a larger scale, especially at the secondary stage of education, to facilitate their entry into higher education.

5.6.1 Policies and schemes such as targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to incentivize parents to send their children to school, providing bicycles for transport, etc., that have significantly increased participation of SEDGs in the schooling system in certain areas will be significantly strengthened across the country.

5.6.2 Making a Single window system (single agency and website) for scholarships, other opportunities and schemes for SEDGs will be coordinated to ensure that all students are aware of, and may apply in a simplified manner on such a 'single window system'.

5.7. Enabling harnessing of the natural talent and unique potential of students opening NCC wings in secondary and higher secondary schools located in tribal dominated areas of different states will be encouraged with collaboration and support from the Ministry of Defence to motivate them for a successful career in the Defence forces.

6. Provisions in RPWD Act, 2016

The right to education is an integral facet of the guarantee of equal rights for children with disabilities and their social inclusion. NEP 2020 is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education considering inclusive education as a system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities. The following are some of the recommendations in the NEP

- **Barrier free access** for all children with disabilities
- **Assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools**, as well as **adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials** (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille)
- **Choice of schooling and equity in education:** Children with benchmark disabilities choose between regular or special schooling and Home-based education (for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools). An audit of home-based education for its efficiency and effectiveness will be initiated and guidelines and standards would be developed based on this audit.
- **Resource centres** will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities and will assist parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for such students as needed. Special educators along with regular teachers would assist in these tasks

The major provisions of the Act are illustrated in the following box:

RPWD Act 2016

Target Groups:

- Blindness
- Low-vision
- Leprosy Cured persons
- Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing)
- Locomotor Disability
- Dwarfism
- Intellectual Disability
- Mental Illness
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Chronic Neurological conditions
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Speech and Language disability
- Thalassemia
- Hemophilia
- Sickle Cell disease
- Multiple Disabilities including deaf blindness
- Acid Attack victim
- Parkinson's disease

Major recommendations:

- Equal educational opportunities;
- Opportunities for sports and recreation activities equally with others;
- Making building, campus and various facilities accessible;
- Reasonable accommodation according to the individual's requirements;
- Individualised support and other supportive measures;
- Imparting education in most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication;
- Suitable pedagogical measures;
- Suitable modifications in the curriculum and examination system;
- Facility of scribe or amanuensis, exemption from second and third language courses;
- Monitoring participation and progress;
- Transportation facilities;
- Training&employing teachers, teachers with disability, teachers qualified in sign language & Braille,
- Training professionals and staff to support inclusive education,
- Establishing adequate number of resource centres,
- Promoting use of appropriate augmentative & alternative modes, means formats of communication,
- Providing books, learning materials and appropriate assistive devices,
- Provision of scholarships,
- Promoting research to improve learning etc.

7. Assessment and certification agencies: Assessment and certification agencies (National Assessment Centre, PARAKH) will formulate guidelines and recommend appropriate tools for conducting assessment, from the foundational stage to higher education (including for

entrance exams), in order to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all students with learning disabilities.

8. Involving Social workers and Counselors for working and connecting with students, parents, schools, and teachers in order to improve attendance and learning outcomes of children belong to SEDGs and disability categories would be a priority action.

9. Teacher education programmes: Inclusion and equity will become a key aspect of teacher education and training for all leadership, administrative, and other positions in schools. The following are the specific recommendations:

9.1 B.Ed. programmes will include training in effective as well as the most recent techniques in pedagogy, including pedagogy with respect to foundational literacy and numeracy, multi-level teaching and evaluation, teaching children with disabilities, teaching children with special interests or talents, use of educational technology, and learner-centered and collaborative learning.

9.2 Shorter post-B.Ed. certification courses will also be made widely available, at multidisciplinary colleges and universities, to teachers who may wish to move into more specialized areas of teaching, such as the teaching of students with disabilities, or into leadership and management positions in the schooling system, or to move from one stage to another between foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary stages.

9.3 In-service teacher education programmes will include awareness and knowledge of how to teach children with specific disabilities (including learning disabilities) as an integral part of all teacher education programmes, along with gender sensitization and sensitization towards all underrepresented groups in order to reverse their underrepresentation.

9.4 Building Capacity of Alternative schools teachers in the teaching of science, mathematics, language, and social studies will be developed including orientation to new pedagogical practices.

10. Alternative forms of schools will be encouraged to preserve traditions or alternative pedagogical styles. These schools will be supported to integrate the subject and learning areas prescribed by the NCFSE into their curricula in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the underrepresentation of children from these schools in higher education. Financial assistance will be provided to introduce science, mathematics, social studies, Hindi, English, State languages, or other relevant subjects in the curriculum, as may be desired by these schools.

11. Libraries and laboratories will be strengthened and adequate reading materials like books, journals, etc., and other teaching-learning materials will be made available. High-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language and to teach other basic subjects using Indian Sign Language will be developed and made available.

12. Sensitization of all stakeholders in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students to the requirements of all students with the notions of inclusion and equity, and the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons will be a major endeavour. Technology-based solutions will be used for the orientation of parents/caregivers along with wide-scale dissemination of learning materials to enable parents/caregivers to actively support their children's learning needs will be accorded priority.

13. Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance through School Complexes and sharing of resources across complexes will improve support for children with disabilities and children belong to SEDGs. The specific details are given below:

13.1 Schools/school complexes will be provided resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training, and for the establishment of resource centres, wherever needed, especially for children with severe or multiple disabilities.

13.2 Schools and school complexes will work and be supported for providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classroom.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 emphasizes upon inculcating Inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational culture in our school education system through infrastructural support and by making corresponding changes in curriculum incorporating materials on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It calls upon the stakeholders to overcome the barriers and remove biases and stereotypes through sensitization programme. The policy aims to promote inclusion, bringing out equity and developing respect for diversity through developing understanding about various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc. among children, teachers and other school functionaries. Implementing of policy will result in empowerment of stake holders through efficient manner of resourcing and more robust and improved governance and monitoring mechanism with cooperation and support across schools for the education of children with disabilities and SEDGs. The School Complexes will impact the

education by bringing reform and empowering our school education system from the perspective of inclusion and equity among all learners in schools, School Management Committee, School Complex Management Committees, school leaders, teachers, students, supporting staff, parents, and local citizens are called to join hands for providing all possible support to school education.