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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EDUCATION POLICIES IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Education for all is a global concern since its long back and it has been ensured that every child has equal right for quality education. Inclusive education is the most constructive approach designed to offer all children a fair opportunity to go to school, learn together, educate and develop their basic life skills necessary to survive. Driving all type of children under the roof of one classroom environment of a school has been globalized by one of sustainable development goals (SDG 4) that ensure inclusive and equitable quality education along with promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The essence of inclusive education becomes high priority in public policy of every nation. India, as a nation, has also shown a high inclination to promoting inclusion in its system of education. The present study explores about various initiatives that reflected in its three policies of education to promote inclusive education. At the same time, the study also makes an explorative comparison of these education policies with respect to how different steps and actions taken for inclusive education at all levels of education. Since its long time back, India has been promoting inclusive education through different ways that are stipulated in its education policies, and the study has inclusively attempted to explore such endeavors and actions towards quality inclusive education of the nation.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Education Policies, School Education, Disadvantage Group.

Introduction

Inclusive education is a modern approach that designed to meet the basic learning needs of all type of children with a special attention on those who are deprived, marginalized and remain segregated. The approach addresses all learners and individual with or without disabilities enable them to learn together under the same roof by accessing to common provisions of school, and community educational setting with a balanced environment (Comprehensive Action Plan for Inclusive Education, 2005). The approach gives an equal educational opportunity for special children to receive mainstream education under the same roof of a school with their age-appropriate peer. It allows school children of all backgrounds to learn and grow together and refers to an education system that incorporates all learners regardless of their physical, mental, social, emotional, linguistic or any other conditions. It is all about an education system that allows for learning together even if they differ from each other in learning styles and pace. "Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (The Salamanca Statement, 1994). There is a need of effective inclusive education system to give all students an equal opportunity to drive to school, grow and develop their basic life skills. Keeping this, the nation urges to provide relevant inclusive setting of overwhelming the barriers to the learning process of every child which is reflected on various acts, schemes, provision and educational policies.

National policy on Education (1968) and Inclusive Education

National policy on Education (NPE, 1968) came into exist with a number of provisions and recommendations in the system of Indian education. It was brought with the recommendation of Indian Education Commission (1964-66). Though, it does not stipulate any components of inclusive education in its entire sections, it primarily focuses some recommendations given by Education Commission, which are the foremost pillar of today's inclusive education. The first focus was on "free and compulsory education" for all children fall under the age group of fourteen by developing appropriate programme and ensuring that all child who come to the school has successfully completed the course. The second focus is on "equalization of educational opportunity" which emphasizes common school system to balance the provision of educational facilities between urban, rural and other backward areas. It also recommended for admitting students on the basis of their merits and to providing free studentships to stop the feelings of social isolation in classroom setting. The main recommendation of NPE 1968 towards inclusive education was to facilitate special educational setting for mentally and physically handicapped children by developing integrated programme which surprisingly enables such children to study in regular class.

National policy on Education (1986) and Inclusive Education

National policy on Education (NPE) 1986 also like earlier policy does not directly use the term "inclusive education". But it tries to incorporate inclusiveness in education in initial stage through various ways. Focusing the recommendations of previous policy



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in regards of special provisions for special children, it has stipulated some new ones to bring into exist which are directly and or indirectly promote inclusive education. In its part-III under the name of ‘national system of education’, it states that “all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have accessed to education of a comparable quality.” This term, ‘comparable quality’ is the indicator of equality of opportunity which is the leading path of inclusiveness and it has perfectly stated that, to promote equality, “it is necessary to provide equal opportunity to all, not only in access, but also in the condition for success”.

In its part IV under the section “education for equality”, NPE 1986 emphasizes on the removal of all types of disparities, education for women’s equality, education for schedule caste, minorities, handicapped and for backward sections and areas. It has given special focus on their education and suggested to provide scaffolding so that they can come to the mainstream of educational society. In case of disabled child, it has brought the physically and mentally challenged learners with equal importance to the general community to prepare them for normal growth and enable them to face life with hope, courage and confidence. Emphasizing these parameters of social inclusion, this policy inherently strives the elements of inclusiveness which were later become the basis of today’s inclusive setup in educational institutes. Its special emphasis was on national education system to stimulate the social inclusion through redesigning the school curriculum, textbook, professional training, orientation programmes of the teachers, decision-makers, school leaders, administrators in regards of women and all types of learners to bring their full participation in vocational, technological, technical, and professional education at various levels. Keeping in mind the basic needs of the children of SCs, and STs for main stream schooling, NPE 1986 takes special attention to provide remedial courses, teaching-learning materials in tribal and local languages at their initial stages of learning, incorporates their sociocultural context in their education, incentives to improve their learning performances; and took initiated to design curricula with the rich tribal cultural identity as well as with their indigenous creative supremacy.

National Education policy (2020) and Inclusive Education

National Education policy (NEP 2020) comes out with several changes in Indian education system at all levels. It enormously emphasizes on the recent needs and demands of education in national as well as global context. The core objectives of new NEP 2020 stated itself in its vision, which are vividly reflected on its entire sections. In its each section and in each component, it accentuates to make integration of all stipulated provision towards inclusion. NEP 2020, unlike earlier two policies, directly integrates the term ‘inclusive education’ under the heading of “School Education.” In its vision, it is stated; “The National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India-centered education system that contributes directly to transforming our Nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all.” Pointing out ‘high quality education to all,’ it strives to make a common and/or unique educational system which will ensure equality, quality and holistic integrity to all type of children. The principles of this policy itself emphasizes to respect the diversity, and to put local context in school curricula and pedagogy which must ensure full equity and inclusion in teaching and learning. It is hoped that the inclusive provisions of this NEP must enable all students to drive in the system of education.

Under the heading of “Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All,” it vibrantly describes the importance of inclusion and equitable education, and explaining the factors that affect inclusion including prejudice and bias in regards of gender, socio-economic status and special needs of the learners. It envisions an education system that should benefit all so that no child misses any opportunities to receive education and excel due to any backgrounds. To bring true inclusion, it identifies the socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) with special provisions for their special attention including gender identities for women, transgender, socio-cultural identities for ST, SC, OBC, Muslim, Migrant Communities, children with special needs for learning disabilities, socio-economic conditions for urban and poor. It strongly recommends to renew existing policies and schemes such as scholarships, incentives, etc. for improving education of these SEDGs groups. Peer tutoring, open schooling, providing bicycles girls for more participation and appropriate infrastructure suggested to provide in ensuring equal access particularly for certain children with special needs. It announces “Special Education Zones (SEZ)” under certain areas of the country with large populations of SDG children, where all schemes and provisions need to be implemented to the maximum extent through additional concern and funding from the Centre and States to improve educational scenario of that Zone. The importance concern is taken on girls’ education by new policy because it recognizes the special and crucial role of women in society. Therefore, it recommends to create ‘Inclusive Fund’ for uplifting girl’s students specially coming from SEDGs section.

Education is considered as the single best weapon for winning social justice and equality. The new education policy itself aims that the education system of the country must incentive all children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of place of birth and background. It reiterates to bridging the social gaps in access and participation on the ground of caste and category. All stakeholders of the school education system must be well known about the needs of all type of learners, the importance of inclusiveness in education, equality, the respect and dignity, security and safety of all. The new policy promotes an educational culture



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which would trigger the best pathway to assist children in becoming empowered individual who, in future, will transform the society into one which would be promoting most vulnerable people of the nation. The new policy triggers a new school culture that must sensitise students, teachers, trained social workers and counselors to frame an inclusive school curriculum. It must integrate the human values such as respect, empathy, open-mindedness, human rights, justice, equity fairness, gender unbiased, non-violence and universal citizenship. The new education policy induces school curriculum to add the knowledge of regional culture, dialects, gender identities, etc. to make aware and develop respect for the diversity in class.

In addition, the new policy further suggests to constitute a “Gender-Inclusive Fund” to promote quality education of girls and transgender. It realises that all the existing policies are not sufficient to striving full inclusion. It is necessary for school teachers, leaders, administrators, and students, to be sensitized in respect of their needs, access of inclusion, respect and dignity for all. It also tries to keep up an inclusive school culture. The inclusion and equity should be the key aspects of teacher education, training for all school leaders and administrators. It significantly invites high competent teachers and school leaders from SEDG groups in regard to bring the quality role models for all students towards inclusion in education from bottom to up. The policy aims to make children more sensitise with the change school curriculum emphasizing empathy, tolerances, inclusion and equity for developing of human values. The new education policy does not restrict inclusive into school education, but it also strives to ensure in teacher and higher education. For this, it recommends highest priorities in ensuring equal opportunities for quality higher education available to all; and envisions in giving equitable and quality access to all learners with a special focus on socially-economically disadvantage groups (SEDGs).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is true to state that our nation has been taking significant initiatives for the inclusion in education through its various policies and schemes since its long back. Analysis of these the national policies in education in regards of inclusive education has recommended inclusive education to be integrated in school culture and its curriculum. It is observed that NPE 1986 tried to stipulate components of inclusive education but not in direct manners. It focused such provisions of equity and equalization which creates the basis of inclusion at later. The NPE 1986 also did in the same pattern by reaccepting and emphasizing the recommendations of previous one (1986). Overall, the earlier two policies directly and indirectly had tried to balance the inclusion through mingling with other components in some sections. But, new NEP 2020 recognizes inclusion education in its independent section. It truly understands the importance and need of inclusive education for the potential development of each child. Focusing special emphasis on inclusion and inclusive culture, NEP makes a special attention for the nation in pen and papers. Now, it is observable to follow up its implementation part in real situation. It is obliged to state that the country is truly realizing the essence and importance of inclusive education, which reflected in new NEP 2020, for national integration, social inclusion and national development.

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