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NEP (2020), SEDGS AND INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

NEP-2020 withholds equity and inclusion as fundamental principles of education to guide “all educational decisions” (NEP, 2020, p.3). It sketches and spell out measures for an inclusive educational system that can ensure participation of all in the educational processes and “eliminate any remaining disparity in access to education” (NEP,2020, p.24). Subsequently it coins a new term ‘Socially Economically Disadvantaged Groups’ (SEDGs) reflecting its ambition to use the word inclusion in its widest possible meaning. The fundamental position accepted by the new policy document is that diversity in learner population is an opportunity in the educational setup to enrich curriculum and make pedagogy all encompassing. A new pedagogical approach is however needed to translate the ambition into reality with a changed mindset. A responsive and inclusive pedagogy is the need of the hour to harness the benefits of the diversity dividend. A conceptual analysis of the concept of inclusive pedagogy is presented in this paper with a view of NEP and SEDGs in view.

Keywords: Inclusion, Inclusive Pedagogy, NEP-2020, SEDGs.

Introduction

Education is a social arrangement to further the development of individual in a personally satisfying and socially constructive way in an engaging and encompassing educational situation at different levels. The changing and pressing social concerns have a continuous influence on the structure and processes of the educational situation providing dynamism to it. One of the pressing social concern is making the social situation accessible to and responsive to all potential learners leading to the issue of Inclusion in education.

Inclusion and SEDGs

The problem of inclusion in Education is a major highlight of NEP-2020. Expressing its concern over the marginalization of different groups of learner population, NEP (2020) coins a new term ‘Socially Economically Disadvantaged Groups’ (SEDGs). The use of the term SEDGs by NEP 2020 is a direct reflection of its conviction in the principle of inclusion and its ambition to use the word inclusion in its widest possible meaning. SEDGs refer to all marginalized groups of the population (based on gender, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities and socio economic conditions) that are underrepresented in education.

The current situation, as evident from the UDISE Report (UDISE + 2021-22) reveals exclusion as a major impediment in the educational growth of the society. High dropout rate is yet a significant challenge in educational expansion denoting exclusion from education of several different groups of learner population including female, transgenders and SC/ST students. NEP promulgates a uniform approach towards inclusion of all these excluded or marginalized groups counted as SEDGs. Thus, the target of inclusion is not merely the divyaang students, but all such marginalized groups. The policy document thus adopts a broader perspective vis a vis inclusion congruent with the contemporary trend of a transcending conception of inclusion extending beyond the limits of special needs children and incorporating all children considered marginalized on basis of different criteria (Overtrup and Overtrup, 2018; Evans, 2007).

Inclusion and NEP-2020

The nation aspires for a just, equitable and inclusive society and NEP 2020 views education as the “best tool” in fulfilling these aspirations (NEP 2020, p.2). Inclusion is a philosophical perspective rooted in the values of democracy and the participation of all (Florian, 2008; Jonsson, 2011) and equity (Ryan and Rottman, 2007). Inclusion is not about social justice based on equal treatment. Rather it is justice based on equitable treatment. It is about valuing the experiences and the background of individuals and hence considering diversity as an asset to cherish. Inclusive education, in the present context, is about acknowledging diversity as dividend and reframing the educational situation to ensure participation, engagement and achievement of all groups of learner defined by their individualism shaped in their sociocultural background and experiences (Ainscow & Miles,2008).



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Consequently NEP (2020) withholds equity and inclusion as fundamental principles of education to guide “all educational decisions” (p.3). Subsequently NEP (2020) goes on to sketch and spell out measures for an inclusive educational system that can ensure participation of all in the educational processes and “eliminate any remaining disparity in access to education” (NEP, 2020, p. 24). Beside the endorsement of the welfare and incentivizing schemes that are already flourishing for an inclusive education, the new education policy speaks of several innovative means to address the challenge of inclusion such as:

- a special focus on the transgenders and including them as SEDG.
- creation of Special Education Zone with large population of SEDGs as target of focussed and concerted effort for inclusion.
- creation of a Gender Inclusion Fund for female students inclusion.
- promotion of ‘Alternative forms of Schooling’ to preserve the cultural resources of the SEDGs in education.
- creation of a single agency to announce and coordinate the various schemes of inclusion for SEDGs, expansion of HEIs with focus on local language instruction (NEP, 2020, p.10.8 & 14.1) and
- promoting Institutional Development Plan for inclusion.

Summarily, the policy document advocates the creation of an inclusive culture to foster inclusive curriculum and pedagogy. It creates a practical context for the ideation, conceptualization and application of a more responsive pedagogy in form of Inclusive Pedagogy as a means to achieve the goals of inclusion.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Pedagogy connotes both the specific acts of teaching and learning as well as the teachers’ beliefs, assumptions and values related to teaching and learning (Alexander, 2013). Inclusion is about ensuring the participation and engagement of all learners into the teaching learning process. Inclusive Pedagogy is then a synthesis of the inclusive practices (the specific teaching acts to prevent marginalization) and the value and belief regarding inclusion in learning and teaching.

Inclusive pedagogy is an approach that capitalizes on diversity. Research findings in the field of psychology and neuro cognitive science, emphasize the existence of individual differences in learning as well as the way the human mind processes and organizes information (Meyer et al, 2014). Further, the socio-cultural perspective on learning proposes learning to take place in the complex of the individual and his/her socio-cultural web of relations and interactions. Thus, an understanding of the relationship between the socio-cultural milieu of students and their learning (Claxton, 2009; Spratt & Florian, 2015) is essential to grasp the diversity in the classroom and to count on all students as rich resources. Subsequently, any shortcomings in students’ achievement of the learning outcomes is to be interpreted as system failure in timely and effectively responding to the diverse needs of the learner (Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre, 2007).

the outcome of the sensitization about the diversity as a pedagogical resource in the classroom and a changed mindset towards systems responsibility to respond to th needs of diverse student groups leads to the emergence fo an inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy aims to create a rich array of accessible experiences (Florian & Black-Williams, 2011). to increase the probability of students’ participation in the educational processes. It is a means to extend the “scope of ordinary schools so they can include a greater diversity of children” (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1995, p. v).

Inclusive pedagogy is thus a responsive pedagogy that “make learning ...accessible and welcoming to all students” through an emphasis on “equitable access to course materials” by all (Sanger, 2020, p.32-33). It is accessible to all and accepted by all owing to its potential to foster a sense of belongingness, empirically established as a key determinant of learning (Terrell, 2018; Laura & Pitman, 2007). Operationally belongingness is achieved in pedagogy when the teacher respects students' voice in teaching-learning decisions through their feedback on classroom processes promoted by an interpersonal relationship that embed in teacher humility (Sanger, 2020). According to Black- (2011), the practice of formative assessment with frequent incorporation of students’ choices and voices in the instruction fosters the sense of belongingness among them and helps them become active participants in the learning process.

Structure of inclusive pedagogy

Following Schulman (1987), inclusive pedagogy includes a cognitive component in form of teacher’s knowledge of strategies, provisions and significance of inclusion (Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre, 2007). Second, inclusive pedagogy includes an affect component in terms of their values and attitude towards inclusion and inclusive practices (Scott et al., 2003, Morina, 2020). Third, inclusive pedagogy includes an action component in form of teachers actions/practices for inclusion in the classroom (Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017).



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Often the teachers' ability to plan their actions for inclusion with appropriate knowledge and attitude is also included as a component of the structure of inclusive pedagogy (Gale and Miles, 2013). This component includes teachers' ability to design a responsive instruction that is "proactive, rather than a reactive response" (Merrill, 2013, p.136) to the needs of different categories of students (Gale and Mills, 2013). A proactive teaching plan is one that anticipates the learner's needs and synthesizes their socio-cultural experiences into the plan whereas a reactive approach encounters the problem first and then makes necessary arrangements to meet the needs.

The pedagogical elements presented by Black and Williams (1998) such as clarification of goals, teacher and student questioning in the classroom, engaging students in peer and self assessment and regular feedback are considered as effective practices/action choice of the teachers in an inclusive classroom and especially for the students categorized as SEDGs (Floriana, 2015; Boud, 1995; Bourke & Mentis, 2014). Self assessment within the overall formative assessment framework is also considered as an effective pedagogical element for inclusion (Florian & Beaton, 2018; Black and Williams, 2009) since it promotes students engagement as agents of assessment' and providing them with "opportunities to develop a clear sense of their progress" (Florian & Beaton, 2018).

Finally, the Universal Design for Learning (Lawrie, et, al, 2017) presents yet another framework to understand the structure of IP. UDL is often misconstrued as a learning design with special reference to Special Education (Fornauf & Erickson, ?). However, in reality UDL is currently acknowledged as a model for inclusive pedagogy in the context of HEIs with diverse student populations and diverse educational and learning needs. It is structured around the principles of multiple means of engagement, representation and expression applied to all the aspects of instruction to make it a model for inclusive pedagogy (Sanger, 2020). It proactively recognises diversity by making inbuilt provisions for accommodation of diverse learning needs in instruction and curriculum in advance. UDL marks a shift from tailoring instruction to each students' learning style towards a proactive approach wherein all students are exposed to diverse formats and learning processes" (Sanger, 2020 p.36) thereby relieving the teachers from ascertaining the needs of each and every learner in the classroom. The proactive inbuilt diverse learning provisions in UDL makes it an obvious modality for IP particularly in context of SEDGs.

The way the structure of inclusive pedagogy can be conceived is non-conclusive. Formative assessment design and Universal Design mentioned in this section are just two illustrations of the myriad of strategies that can be included under the umbrella term of inclusive pedagogy. Since every individual is a valuable resource in the growth of the nation (NEP 2020), education is the most effective means to harness their contribution. Since a classroom is a miniature society that includes a diverse population of students, there exists diversity in learning needs of the students including those of the SEDGs. Consequently, education and hence pedagogy needs to be responsive to the diverse learning needs of the students by creating and providing "rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It must ensure additional support or extra help they need without treating them differently from others" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011 as quoted in Floriana, 2014, p.). It does so by expanding the access of learning to all (Sanger & Gleason, 2020).

The Reflections

Inclusive Pedagogy is the need of the time. It is the way to fulfill the aspirations expressed by NEP 2020 and to prevent marginalization. The most significant barriers identified for the development of inclusive pedagogy were the lack of an inclusive mindset, lack of knowledge regarding pedagogy, high teaching loads and lack of time to develop new methods (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). It has already been explained in the previous section that an Inclusive Pedagogy has three important pillars viz. the cognitive, the affect and the action pillars.

Preparing teachers for inclusion and hence for inclusive pedagogy initially demands an attitudinal shift (the affect). they need to be oriented towards the dividends that diversity brings into the classroom. An attitudinal shift is also needed regarding the overall perspective on students diverse needs. Rather than thinking of the diverse needs as something that requires some add on arrangement in their regular teaching practices, the practices can themselves be made encompassing to incorporate the students needs. The teachers need to believe in students' diversity as an opportunity for enrichment rather than an impediment in the classroom processes (Shields, 2000; Tiwari, 2005).

A shift in attitude is made possible through knowledge (the cognitive component) about inclusion, about diversity and about the way diversity can bring dividend into classroom proceedings. They need to acknowledge that learning failure among students is to be located not in the child but in the system itself. A general sensitization towards benefits of inclusion is necessary including



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awareness about the feasibility of such pedagogical approach on the one hand and possibility of corresponding strategies and means to implement the approach.

A shift in attitude appended by sensitization towards inclusive pedagogy can prepare teachers to innovate with practices (action component) that are inclusive and that makes curricular materials accessible for all including the SEDGs.

Finally, the realization of inclusive pedagogy in actual classroom situation demands the creation of a rich empirical knowledge base related to the various conceptual and practical aspects of inclusive pedagogy particularly when the idea of inclusive pedagogy in its broader sense is of relatively recent origin. Even though studies are reported in the literature pertaining to inclusive pedagogy (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1995; Boud, 1995; Black and Williams, 1998 ; Scott et al., 2003; Shields, 2000; Tiwari, 2005; Evans, 2007; Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre, 2007; Ryan and Rottman, 2007; Laura & Pitman, 2007; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Florian, 2008; Black and Williams, 2009; Jonsson, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Alexander, 2013; Gale and Miles, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Meyer et al, 2014; Claxton, 2009; Spratt & Florian, 2015; Lawrie, et al, 2017; Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017 ; Florian & Beaton, 2018; Overtrup and Overtrup, 2018; Terrell, 2018; Morina, 2020; Sanger & Gleason, 2020) with a focus on different perspectives of such as use of assessment tasks as elements of inclusive pedagogy (Boud, 1995; Black and Williams, 1998 ; Florian, 2008; Black and Williams, 2009; Bourke & Mentis, 2014; Florian & Beaton, 2018), universal learning design (Lawrie, et al, 2017; Fornauf & Erickson, ?; Sanger, 2020), teachers attitude (Gale and Miles, 2013; Merrill, 2013; Seatter & Ceulemans, 2017), more studies are needed in the Indian context to further consolidate the new pedagogical approach.

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This prompts us to conclude that not only is more research required into inclusive pedagogy in general, but that said research should strive to include other voices also. Understanding what teachers do, and how they do it, from the students' perspective, may provide extremely valuable information for gaining insight into the key elements of the teaching and learning process that foster inclusion. Other authors have concluded that the voice of students is a powerful lever for improving educational practices and for advancing towards inclusion (Canning, 2017; Dare & Nowicki,).

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