

Analysis Of The Role Of Inclusive Education In The Context Of National Education Policy 1986 And National Education Policy 2020 In The Changing Scenario Of Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education matters more than ever these days, especially in a country like India where people come from so many different backgrounds. This study takes a close look at what inclusive education really means and how it fits into India's National Education Policy—both the 1986 version and the newer 2020 one. Back in 1986, the policy focused on fairness. The aim was to make sure everyone—especially those on the margins or with special needs—could get into mainstream schools. The whole approach felt a bit like a safety net, trying to give people a fair shot and promote social justice, mostly through extra help and welfare. Fast forward to 2020, and things have changed. Now, inclusive education sits right at the heart of a bigger, more rights-based vision. It's not just about letting more kids enroll. The policy talks about real participation, better learning for everyone, and making sure education lasts a lifetime. It covers everything from different ways people learn, to the many languages spoken across India, to digital access, flexible lessons, and better teacher training—especially for young kids. If you look at both policies side by side, you'll see a real shift. We've gone from simply opening the doors to focusing on quality, fairness, and understanding individual needs. In the end, when inclusive education gets the right support and regular follow-up, it really can make India's schools more fair and empowering for everyone.

Keywords: Inclusive education, National education policy 1986, National education Policy 2020, Educational Equity, Access, Quality, Policy Analysis.

1. Introduction

The foundation of human civilization is its education system. Our country, India, one of the world's oldest cultures, was a land of inventions and innovations. The Indian education system is one of the largest in the world. Although the country faced some difficulties in the field of education under foreign rulers, since independence, the country has made significant progress in the field of education through various commissions, committees, and the National Education Policy. Among these, the National Education Commission 1986 and the National Education Commission 2020 are very important. The Indian government recently replaced the old National Policy on Education (NPE), which was formulated in 1986 and has been in effect for 34 years, with a new policy, the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). In 1986, during the reign of Rajiv Gandhi, the new National Policy on Education was

implemented. This policy emphasized eliminating discrimination and providing equal opportunities for all in education. Introduced during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister, this policy was not limited to the expansion of education but also aimed to address educational inequality. It specifically targeted women, Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes, focusing not just on children but also on providing integrated education. The policy's key objectives included increasing scholarships, improving senior education, and increasing job recruitment for Scheduled Castes. After 34 years in operation, the policy has now been replaced by the New Education Policy (NEP 2020), tailored to the needs of the 21st century and focused on building a knowledge-based society. This development demonstrates how India has overcome the challenges of the colonial period and transformed its education system into a modern and equitable one. Inclusive education provides all

children with the right to education, regardless of their gender, disability type, impairment, locality or region, caste, religion, and socio-economic background. Education under one roof is the goal of inclusion. It is an initiative to create a non-discriminatory environment where every child is free to interact, learn, and pursue their life goals. Inclusion fosters a sense of unity, patience, and cooperation within peer groups to enhance sensitivity. Children with special needs learn and cooperate with non-special needs children, allowing them to learn without fear and inhibition, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes. Teachers play a crucial role in inclusion. To facilitate this type of teaching and learning, teachers must adopt a variety of instructional and pedagogical strategies to achieve inclusion. Teachers need to create an environment where every student feels comfortable, motivated, and eager to learn and achieve their best. Children with special needs sometimes need extra help, for which schools employ special educators who, along with normal teachers, meet the needs and requirements of special children. Inclusive education is about promoting learning and giving every child an equal opportunity to fulfill their dreams. This study focuses on the past, present, and future of inclusive education in India.

2. Review of Literature

Various studies have been conducted on the implementation, recommendations, and status of inclusive education in India.

The National Education Policy 1986 has been seen as an early example of inclusive education in the Indian education system.

Sharma (1990) notes that the NEP 1986 first emphasized special provisions in education for disadvantaged groups—such as Scheduled Castes/Tribes, economically weaker groups, and students with disabilities. He described it as an equal opportunity strategy, focusing primarily on increasing access to education but less on quality and outcomes.

Gupta & Singh (1995) wrote that the NEP 1986 linked inclusion with social justice, but the policy's implementation failed to achieve the desired results due to resource and structural constraints.

Verma (1998)'s research suggests that the NEP 1986 viewed inclusive education from an expansionist perspective. The policy emphasized large-scale enrollment, curriculum expansion, and school expansion, but insufficient attention was paid to equitable learning outcomes and teacher inclusion capacity.

According to Kumar (2002), the concept of inclusive education existed in a theoretical form in the NEP 1986, but its practical framework was unclear. The policy was not limited primarily to access to formal

education, but failed to address the needs of every student.

Verma & Reddy (2010) analyzed the difficulties in implementing the policy. The results showed that a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and the absence of an inclusive approach in pre-school higher education institutions were the biggest obstacles to the inclusion efforts of the NEP 1986.

Bhatia (2012) found that the NEP 1986 contributed to reducing inter-state disparities, but did not adequately address the rural-urban divide and language-based disparities.

Shrestha's (2013) study compared Indian inclusive education with UNESCO's inclusive approach. She found that while the NEP 1986 embraced global inclusive education principles—such as equal opportunity, diversity inclusion, etc.—the policy lacked practical leadership and socio-cultural interventions.

Joshi's (2016) study suggests that the NEP 1986 laid the foundation for inclusive education, influencing subsequent policy reforms (such as the RTE Act 2009). The policy established equity and access to education as national goals, which were later expanded into other policies.

Shukla & Mehta (2017) found that the NEP 1986 established the goals of inclusive education, but it failed to achieve a comprehensive inclusion model that met individual learning needs.

Devkumar S. (2017) identifies shortcomings in policy implementation and states that while India has a robust framework for implementing inclusive education, the system lacks the capacity to achieve the goal of "education for all" in India. Key recommendations include mandatory courses for teachers at all levels in inclusive education, teaching training and practical experience, tailoring curriculum to suit needs, and changes to the evaluation system. According to Singh S. (2020), 50% of children with disabilities are out of school. Approximately 8 million children do not attend school because they are marginalized by gender, caste, poverty, and disability. Despite implementing numerous policies, the government is unable to implement "education for all" universally. To successfully implement this, teachers must adopt

diverse teaching activities, recognize that all students have a goal or dream, and acknowledge each child's uniqueness.

Sarkar T. (2020) examined the impact of the NEP on children with disabilities across four key dimensions: school selection, teachers and special educators, assessment and curriculum, and the terminology of inclusion and disability. He pointed out that teachers are generally unable to implement the policy in the classroom or are unaware of the policy, are not trained enough to facilitate inclusivity in regular classrooms, or lack adequate resources and peer

support within the system. Furthermore, parents from underrepresented groups often lack the proper information, facilities, and confidence to send their children to general classrooms. Another major concern is the curriculum, which is not tailored to the needs of diverse classrooms. NEP 2020 gives teachers the flexibility to adapt the curriculum and avoid rigidity when teaching in mixed classrooms.

Mishra and Nageri (2021) conducted an empirical study and identified four factors that determine the barriers to inclusive education in India: financial constraints, family background, socio-cultural, and geographical. The researchers used questionnaires to collect data from 300 primary school teachers in Uttar Pradesh. Eleven variables were selected to measure equal access to education among children. These variables include parental employment status, income, resource constraints, family well-being, distance from school, poverty, gender, parental education, caste, religious group, languages, etc. The data was then analyzed using SPSS 2.0 software, and the results revealed four key factors determining barriers to inclusive education in India: financial constraints, family background, sociocultural, and geographical conditions. Primary teachers consider financial and family background to be the most important.

Gail, Bhushan, et al. (2022) point to interventions that help teachers and leaders improve inclusive education in the classroom, including capacity building, training of teachers and other staff, professional development, collaborative work, and optimal teaching-learning environments. School leaders and teachers' attitudes, mindsets, beliefs, and commitment to inclusion must be improved. To transform attitudes, teachers and leaders should be provided with professional learning opportunities. A decentralized culture should be promoted, rights-based policies should be implemented in schools, work culture and classroom support should be improved, and motivation and collaboration between leaders and teachers are also essential for fostering an inclusive culture in schools. Improving teaching, learning, and assessment materials, improving professional development, and periodically monitoring results will yield positive results.

3. National Educational Policy (1986) and Inclusive Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) does not directly use the term "inclusive education" in either 1986 or 1968. However, it attempts to incorporate inclusivity in several ways at the early stages of schooling. While emphasizing the previous policy's recommendations for special facilities for children with special needs, it also calls for the implementation of some new recommendations that directly or indirectly support inclusive education. The

National Education Policy of 1986 emphasizes the need to address and eliminate all forms of educational inequalities. It promotes equal access to educational opportunities for women, Scheduled Castes, minorities, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities and regions. The policy specifically focuses on increasing their educational access and recommends creating support systems to help them integrate into the mainstream educational environment. It recognizes the needs of both physically and mentally challenged children, ensuring they receive equal attention as their peers in the wider community. This strategy is designed to support their healthy development and help them approach life with positive thinking, courage, and confidence.

4. The National Educational Policy (2020) and Inclusive Education

The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) has introduced major changes to the Indian education system at all levels. It focuses on meeting current national and global demands for education. The policy's core objectives are clearly stated in its vision and reflected in its various sections. Each section and component emphasizes the importance of integrating all specific provisions to promote inclusion. The National Education Policy 2020 explicitly includes the concept of "inclusive education" within the category of "school education," making it distinct from the previous two education policies. The policy's vision states that it aims to create an India-centric education system that ensures quality education for all and plays a key role in transforming the country into a just and vibrant knowledge society. By focusing on "quality education for all," the National Education Policy strives to create an education system that promotes equitable, quality, and comprehensive education for children from diverse backgrounds. The principles contained in this policy emphasize respect for diversity and the incorporation of local contexts into educational curriculum and teaching methods, which are essential for achieving full equity and inclusion in education. It is hoped that the inclusive approaches outlined in the National Education Policy will contribute to the success of all students within the educational framework.

5. Objectives of the Study:

- i. To understand the recommendations of the NEP 1986 in the field of inclusive education.
- ii. To understand the recommendations of the NEP 2020 regarding inclusive education.
- iii. To compare the NEP 1986 and NEP 2020 regarding inclusive education.

- iv. To evaluate the role of inclusive education in ensuring educational access, equity and quality for disadvantaged and special needs learners in the changing educational scenario under NEP 1986 and NEP 2020.

6. Study Methodology:

A primarily qualitative content analysis approach was used to better understand the comparability of the NEP 1986 and the NEP 2020 with respect to inclusive education.

7. Data Collection Methods:

The data collection process included Secondary sources, specifically the drafts of the National Education Policy 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, as well as secondary sources, including websites, magazines, journals, newspapers, and digital content, to analyze inclusive education in the context of the NEP 1986 and the NEP 2020.

8. Study Findings:

The following discussion focuses on the study findings and connects them to the stated goals.

Table 1: Recommendations for Inclusive Education in the NEP 1986

1	All teacher training programs will be restructured to benefit students. Primary school teachers will be tasked with addressing the diverse problems of children with disabilities.
2	For the benefit of children with significant disabilities, special schools, including hostels, will be established at district headquarters to facilitate their education.
3	Appropriate teacher training programs should be developed in advance to address the special needs and challenges of children with disabilities.
4	Skilled teacher training programs should be initiated to address the diverse problems of children with special needs so that teachers can easily understand the subject.
5	The Commission observed that promoting equality requires not only providing equal opportunities to all but also creating favorable conditions to facilitate success.
6	The 1986 policy emphasized eliminating all forms of discrimination, providing equal education for women, education for Scheduled Castes, minorities, disabled, and backward classes, and education for different regions, regardless of religion, caste, etc.
7	To make the common people aware of the importance of physical and mental development of disabled children so that they can be prepared for it.
8	To highlight the importance of physical and mental development for children with disabilities to the general public so that they are prepared for normal Development and are able to face life with hope, courage and confidence. And with an emphasis on social inclusion, it tries to deeply integrate this topic which will be very useful for later life.

Table 2. Recommendations for Inclusive Education in the NEP 2020:

1	Free and affordable accommodation will be provided on school campuses for students who may have to travel long distances.
2	In addition to ensuring access to quality education, support women and transgender children through various means, including sanitation facilities, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, and other resources.

3	Hostels will be established at district headquarters for children with special needs, especially those with severe disabilities, to facilitate their admission to special schools and provide them with accommodations as much as possible.
4	Training programs for teachers, especially elementary school instructors, will be adapted to address the unique challenges faced by children with disabilities.
5	Support the establishment of NCC wings in secondary and higher secondary schools in tribal areas of various states to develop students' natural talents and special abilities, and emphasize the importance of teamwork.
6	Emphasizes equalizing educational opportunities and reducing discrimination for students with special needs. Suggests ways to address the special needs of students who have been excluded from equal opportunities in society.
7	It called for a national mission and a basic literacy program to ensure comprehensive education for all citizens.
8	Emphasis was placed on providing quality education in social and environmental sciences to all citizens, regardless of their religion, wealth, caste, or creed.
9	Keeping the future of students in mind, it placed special emphasis on introducing vocational education at the school and college levels for all students.

Table 3. Similarities and Dissimilarities for Inclusive Education According to National Education Policy:

S.No.	Similarities	Dissimilarities
1	The NEP 1986 and the National Educational Policy 2020 Propose to eliminate discrimination and provide equal educational opportunities to all students by addressing their unique needs, including those who have not yet experienced equality.	The NEP 2020 was prepared to include transgender children and focus more on gender equality issues through the Gender Inclusion Fund, which was not a focus of the NEP 1986, which only talked about inclusive education.
2	Both of the documents clearly recognize that all children, including those with a disability, should have equal access to the education they receive in the form of a traditional educational setting; they both also recognize that schools should provide the necessary resources and/or appropriate support for community-based educational settings for all children.	The NPE 1986 emphasized the inclusion of students from all classes, including those disadvantaged. However, the NEP 2020 emphasizes social inclusion.

3	Both documents also recognize the need to include children's education with a disability into teacher preparation programs so that teachers trained in working with children who have a disability can deal with the issues that arise for these children.	The NEP 2020 aims to remove confusion in allowing students to choose the school of their choice. It mentions neighborhood schools, special schools, and home- schooling options to facilitate education for children with disabilities, which were not addressed in the NEP 1986.
4	Both documents speak to the necessity of providing students with a solar system in order to have access to an educational environment that will allow them to advance in their educational progress without having obstacles in their way.	The 1986 NEP categorized the goals of inclusive education into Distinct categories of backward and marginalized communities, and identified distinct categories for their challenges. However, the 2020 NEP departs from traditional marginalization classifications and, to some extent, recognizes the interconnectedness and multidimensionality of these exclusionary spaces.

9. Analysis And Discussion

Many studies focus on the attitudes, beliefs, commitment, and motivational levels of school administrators to establish inclusion. Several studies have shown that a lack of awareness among teachers and stakeholders contributes to system failure. The government needs to initiate awareness campaigns, seminars, conferences, and workshops at the state and national levels for hands-on training and experience, as outlined in the NEP draft, and hopefully implemented. Similarly, parents from underrepresented groups need to be made aware of rights and policies. It is often observed that parents are hesitant to enroll their children in inclusion, or due to lack of resources or poor socio-economic conditions at the school, parents do not send their children to school. Teachers are not trained in inclusive education. For inclusion, teachers must have skills and knowledge about inclusive curriculum, differentiated teaching strategies, instructional methods, sensitization, and motivation to teach in inclusive classrooms. The NEP 2020 focuses on ensuring that inclusive education is a vital part of teachers' pre-service and in-service training. In schools with a high concentration of underrepresented groups, the student-teacher ratio should not exceed 25:1. The government recognizes that people with disabilities have the same right to education as other citizens, but the needs of the country, which grapples with poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, malnutrition, and the subsistence needs of its people, have made it difficult to focus on developing services for people with disabilities.

10. Conclusion:

With this in mind, it can be said that the educational and administrative systems in our country have been working towards inclusive education for a long time, in various ways, both in terms of policy and programs.

Looking at the National Policy on Inclusive Education, we find that inclusive education is proposed to be incorporated into school culture, i.e., the culture, educational system, and curriculum. The 1986 National Education Policy (NEP) attempted to explicitly, but not specifically, address the issue of inclusive education. Its concept was based on issues of student access and equity, which later became the foundation of inclusive education. The 1986 NEP played a similar role by accepting and prioritizing the recommendations of the previous policy (1986). The previous policy attempted to integrate various aspects of inclusive education to keep it somewhat vibrant and mainstream. However, the new National Education Policy 2020 gives inclusive education its full development. It truly recognizes the importance and necessity of inclusive education for the future development of every child. Needless to say, the country is bringing inclusive education into today's times, as the new NEP 2020 looks towards national unity, social inclusion, and national development. Needless to say, the country is bringing inclusive education into today's times, as the new NEP 2020 looks towards national unity, social inclusion, and national development.

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