

8. Transforming Teacher Education through NEP 2020: Embracing Innovation, Research and Pedagogical Reforms in Special Education

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a forward-thinking approach to special education in India. It marks a significant departure from previous education policies that primarily catered traditional education and kept special education on fringes. Historically, in India special education has received limited attention, with teacher training programs often lacking a comprehensive focus on inclusive practices. Teachers were minimally prepared and inadequately equipped to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. NEP 2020, however, aims to revolutionize teacher training of special educator along with special children. It emphasizes on the importance of training special teachers in inclusive pedagogies, equipping them with the skills to effectively cater to diverse learners. The policy advocates for the development of specialized training modules that focus on differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and collaborative teaching methods. This paper also explores the challenges and opportunities towards the implementation of these reforms by analysing how teacher education programs must adapt to align with NEP 2020's vision. It also suggests necessary pedagogical changes, enhancing teacher collaboration, and having a continuous professional development keenly focused on special education. By critically assessing the gaps present in current teacher training practices and proposing respective improvements, this study aims to contribute towards the successful realization of Inclusive Education System under NEP 2020.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Special Education, Inclusive Education, Diverse Learners, Pedagogical Changes

1. Introduction:

In India, teacher education has been shaped by a series of influential commissions and policies that have aimed to enhance and reform the educational landscape of the nation since independence. From the pioneering work initiated by the University Education Commission in 1948, to the revolutionary recommendations of the Kothari Commission in the 1960s and the pivotal National Policy on Education of 1986, each of these policies consistently

emphasized the importance of quality teaching, innovative pedagogical practices, and the need for research- driven educational strategies.

However, as India advances into the 21st century, the demands of its education system have evolved. The need for a more holistic, inclusive, and forward-looking approach—one that caters to the future and serves all segments of society—has gradually but surely emerged.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the latest government, marks a transformative stance in this direction. It offers a comprehensive framework aimed at remodelling the Indian education system, particularly in the field of teacher education. NEP 2020 goes beyond the sectional reforms of previous policies by advocating for a more radical reimagining of the role and involvement of teachers, as well as the methods by which they are trained. It places a strong emphasis on innovation, research, and the promotion of technology, while also promoting the inclusivity of children with special needs and upholding the targets of the RTE 2010.

Unlike its predecessors, NEP 2020 envisions teachers as key agents of change, responsible not only for imparting knowledge but also for nurturing critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility among students, especially the 'Divyangjan.'

NEP 2020 calls for a significant overhaul in teacher education, emphasizing practical, hands-on training and incorporating modern teaching practices that align with global educational standards. It is critical to note that while earlier policies laid the foundation for improving general teacher education in India, NEP 2020 aims to elevate it to a level that goes beyond catering to the neurotypical segment of society and also fosters the needs of children with special needs. It further aims to train teachers to teach these children in a holistic manner, thereby laying the foundation for a knowledgeable, innovative, and inclusive society.

2. Methodology: The paper uses Qualitative analysis methodology and presents findings from various peer reviewed papers, blogs and official documents released by government of India.

3. Findings: The paper takes into account the comprehensive findings from various literatures and presents them below in a sectional form.

1.1 NEP 2020 and its Nuances: Accommodating Special Educators

NEP 2020 envisions teachers as the architects of future generations, responsible for imparting cognitive skills while nurturing social, emotional, and academic competencies in both neurotypical and special children. The paradigm in which modern teachers operate necessitates a pedagogical evolution—moving beyond traditional teaching methods and transforming into facilitators of learning who guide students in developing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and emotional intelligence.

Teachers in today's educational landscape are encouraged to create learning environments that promote empathy, collaboration, and resilience among students, ensuring their overall development. This approach redefines the teacher's role from merely being an information provider to becoming a mentor who supports students, especially the 'Divyangjan,' in becoming well-rounded individuals capable of navigating the complexities of life

1.1.1 Focus on Inclusivity and Special Education

1.1.1.a. Special Education Integration:

One of the key tenets of NEP 2020 has been the integration of special education training into mainstream teacher education programs. Teachers are expected to get trained in special methodologies that can help them cater special students thereby creating inclusive classrooms. One of the proposed tools to achieve it is individualized education plans (IEPs). Educators are expected to devise IEPs to tailor learning experiences for students with varying abilities, ensuring that their specific needs are adequately met. This integration is even more important in rural and underdeveloped areas of our country, where access to specialized support may not be sufficient. NEP 2020's commitment towards equipping all teachers with the skills necessary to support students with special needs, ensuring that inclusive education is not just a theoretical ideal but a practical reality and has been rightly highlighted in the official document of National Education Policy, 2020 as well Nida Waris, Dr. Shahla Shabeeh Shaheen, 2024 , Singh. A and Dr. Kumar. R 2020, and Dr. Vyas. P, 2021 .

3.1.1.b Training for Diverse Learning Needs:

NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on ensuring that teachers are equipped to address the diverse needs of students, ranging from neurotypical and marginalized groups to those with special education needs. This requires them to be trained in recognizing and accommodating various learning disabilities, as well as employing inclusive teaching practices. For instance, the training programs of special educators are expected to contain modules on differentiated instruction, where they learn lesson designing that can cater varying levels of ability within a specific classroom. This approach not only promotes equity but also ensures that student in need of special care receive the necessary support. The practice enables promotion of inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive.

3.1.1.c Resource Allocation and Support:

NEP 2020 also emphasizes on the need for appropriate and adequate resources that support special education. This involves the development of specialized training programs for the educators along with access to modern assistive technologies, and collaboration with special education professionals. The policy even advocates for the establishment of resource centres in schools, where teachers can have an access to the tools and materials that are designed to support students with special needs. Further, the policy encourages a harmonic partnership

between the schools and NGOs that specialize in special education. Mondal. P,2020, suggests that this process equips teachers with additional expertise and support. Therefore, such resource allocations become crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices, as it ensures that teachers have the tools, they need to support all students effectively.

1.1.2 Continuous Professional Development:

NEP 2020 aims to achieve its goal towards training Special Educators by laying emphasis on their continuous professional development. It recognises the dynamic nature of education, and hence advocates for regular and comprehensive training programs that can keep them updated with the latest pedagogical and technological advancements that are in coherence with special student's needs while being synchronised with the curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to participate in professional learning communities, where they can share their experiences, discuss innovative practices, and explore new teaching methods. Studies underscore the importance of continuous development, demonstrating that it not only equips teachers with up- to-date knowledge but also motivates them to effectively implement new teaching methodologies and share these ideas with their peers.

1.1.3 Curriculum and Pedagogical Reforms

1.1.3.a. Integration of Technology:

The integration of technology into teacher training and classroom instruction is a cornerstone of NEP 2020. Teachers, especially special educators, are expected to incorporate digital tools into their teaching practices, thereby enhancing learning experiences, supporting personalized education, and fostering interactive learning environments. By using adaptive learning platforms, teachers can tailor lessons to meet the individual needs of students, improving engagement and enhancing learning outcomes. The policy encourages the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) tools to create immersive learning experiences, not just in traditionally practical subjects like science but also in social sciences and history. A study by Nida Waris and Dr. Shahla Shabeeh Shaheen even highlights how this technological integration not only improves teaching effectiveness but also prepares students for a digitally-driven world.

3.1.3.b Curriculum Revamp:

NEP 2020 calls for a significant reform in Special Educators curriculum, emphasizing practical hands-on training and the incorporation of modern teaching practices. This revamp aims to cater the children having special needs while bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-life application. For example, the latest teacher education program encourages to include modules on experiential learning, where educators are to engage in real-world teaching scenarios, through internships in diverse school settings where they would cater both neurotypical as well as special children. Also, the modern setup provides space for

simulations that mimic classroom challenges and provides educator an opportunity to learn in a practical manner. Mandal.P,2024 even points to the necessity of this curriculum revamp, arguing that it equips teachers with the tools needed to foster a more engaging and effective learning environment .

1.1.4 Assessment and Accountability

1.1.4.a. Revised Assessment Framework:

NEP 2020 proposes an updated assessment system for evaluating the performance of teachers, which includes assessing their methods and its effectiveness in addressing the diverse learning needs. They are to be evaluated not only on their academic instruction but also on their capability of supporting and including all students, particularly those who demand special needs. Therefore, teacher evaluations may include a combination of classroom observations, peer reviews and student feedback. Waris.N, Shaheen.D, 2024 emphasizes that this revised assessment framework is crucial for driving continuous improvement in teaching practices.

3.1.1.b Monitoring and Support Systems:

NEP 2020 advocates for having a robust monitoring as well as support system that can ensure effective implementation of special education practices. This would involve regular reviews of an educator's performance and the provision of providing additional support where needed. To implement it a schools might develop mentoring programs, where new educators would be guided by experienced special who would even provide them support to inculcate inclusive education. Additionally, the policy encourages the use of latest technologies where data is collected and used to monitor a student's progress, allowing teachers to make informed decisions and provide best possible support to their students. Mandal.P,2024 suggests that these monitoring and support systems are vital for ensuring that teachers are able to meet the diverse needs of their students, particularly those with special education needs.

1.2 Challenges in Accommodating Special Educators under NEP 2020:

Rangaranjan.et al,2023, Pancholi.H and Maurya.H.,2023 , Meena.M, 2022 , Dr. Rani.R, 2022, indicate certain challenges that can hinder the progress of NEP 2020 towards promoting Special Educators progress. These challenges include:

1.2.1 Insufficient Specialized Training:

A significant challenge towards developing a setup facilitating inclusive education is the lack of specialized training for special educators/ teachers. Current education programs still do not adequately seem to prepare educators for the complexities of inclusive classrooms. This shortcoming in training can lead to difficulties in effective implementation of inclusive teaching practices and addressing the unique needs of special learners.

1.2.2 Resource Limitations:

Many educational institutions face significant constraints due to a lack of adequate resources. These limitations include shortages of assistive technologies, specialized teaching materials, and appropriate infrastructure. This problem is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where even the basic facilities necessary to support inclusive education are often lacking. As a result, special educators struggle to perform their roles effectively, making it difficult to implement inclusive education successfully.

1.2.3 Rigid Curriculum and Assessment Methods:

The traditional education system has historically failed to accommodate the diverse learning styles and needs of students especially of children with special needs. The rigid curriculum has traditionally marginalized students with disabilities and has prevented them from receiving the individualized attention and support they should be provided. Special educators generally struggle to adapt these curriculum to meet the needs of special students, leading to a disconnect between the intentions and realities.

1.2.4 Lack of Continuous Professional Development:

While the emphasis of NEP 2020 has been towards the importance of professional training many educators continue to lack training and support. Special educators need a thorough development plan and without the latest knowledge and strategies their efficiency to effectively teach students suffer.

1.2.5 Need for Collaborative Approaches:

Various stakeholders, from teachers, parents, to community members and policy makers should have a continuous flow of information and ideas to foster the growth of Special Education, however, there has always been a lack of effective communication and collaboration. This has not just impeded the development of a supportive learning environment for children with special needs but has also impacted special educators career and growth prospects.

1.3 Remedies Proposed:

To address the stark challenges encircling specialized training, certain remedies have been proposed. These remedies involve integrating exclusively designed modules on inclusive education that deal with topics like differentiated instruction, classroom management methods for diverse learners, as well as the use of assistive technologies. Practical training, like internships in inclusive classrooms has also been proposed so that special educators can have hands-on experience with special education tools.

1.3.1 Continuous Professional Development:

For already working teachers in the profession the importance of ongoing training and support can't be overestimated. They can attend Regular workshops thereby providing themselves with peer learning opportunities. Also professional learning communities can serve as effective means of keeping educators updated with the latest inclusive practices. All these professional developments can ensure that teachers get to adapt to the evolving needs of time and foster students in an environment where all learners thrive.

1.3.2 Policy Support and Resource Allocation:

In order to successfully implement NEP 2020's idea of inclusive education, robust policy support and adequate resource allocation towards Special educators training is critical. The government has to ensure that institutions have necessary funding, infrastructure, and resources to support the noble initiative. Additionally, there is also a requirement of frequent monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process so that the impending gaps can be covered.

1.3.3 Community Involvement:

Raising awareness about the importance of inclusive education and highlighting its benefits can encourage active community participation, fostering a more supportive learning environment for students with special needs. This approach not only promotes the holistic development of these students but also helps educators cultivate a positive and rewarding experience in their teaching practices.

4. Conclusion:

NEP 2020 is a forward-thinking policy that benefits not only traditional teachers but also special educators by incorporating the latest innovations and research. It enables educators to fully leverage pedagogical reforms, paving the way for the holistic growth of inclusive education. By promoting continuous professional development and integrating special education into mainstream teacher training, the policy has created an educational system that is both inclusive and effective. The emphasis on technology, curriculum revamp, and revised assessment frameworks ensures that teachers are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students. This fosters an environment where every child, whether neurotypical or with special needs, can thrive. However, it is essential to acknowledge that certain challenges impact special educators, including insufficient specialized training, limitation of resources and lack of continuous professional development. Addressing these challenges through training modules, improved resource allocation, and enhanced community involvement, will be crucial in ensuring the successful implementation of NEP 2020's inclusive vision and by doing so, India can truly lead the way in creating an educational system that not only aspires to becoming inclusive but also achieves it.

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