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National level practices on education of children with disabilities

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Abstract

Education is the right of every child because it provide him to meet the challenges of life. The children with disabilities (CWD) need this all the more, to supplement their differential talents so that they can prepare themselves for a happy productive and useful life. Efforts to educate children with disabilities began soon after independence in India. An attempt has been made to examine the policies and legislations for educating the children with disabilities in India after post- constitution era. In the final section, challenges for providing education to CWD and in that light some recommendations were made. The enabling environment includes interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of a disability-inclusive education system, including policies, disability data, plans, leadership, coordination and financing.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Needs, Human Rights

Introduction

“Education of Children with Special Disabilities”

For life to go on—change is inevitable. Change is never easy especially when it involves a large number of individuals and an established system. Yet change is necessary when innovative practices demonstrate greater effectiveness than past services.

Education is a powerful instrument of social change, and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. Thereby, helping to bridge the gap between the different sections of society. The educational scene in the country has undergone major change over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. In 1944, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) published a comprehensive report called the Sergeant Report on the post-war educational development of the country. As per the report, provisions for the education of the handicapped were to form an essential part of the national system of education, which was to be administered by the Education Department. According to this report, handicapped children were to be sent to special schools only when the nature and extent of their defects made this necessary. The Kothari Commission (1964–66), the first education commission of independent India, observed: “the education of the handicapped children should be an inseparable part of the education system.” The commission recommended experimentation with integrated programmes in order to bring as many children as possible into these programmes (Alur, 2002) [2].

The government’s agenda to universalise elementary education, and its commitment to the Directive Principles of the Constitution, are guided by the recognition that a new universal system of education should be based on equity, the redressal of past imbalances, and the provision of access to quality education, especially for marginalised groups. Recent educational developments and the Seventy Third and Seventy Fourth Constitutional Amendments outline the possibility of entrusting basic education to the local elected bodies in towns and villages. This would allow for community participation in education at the elementary level and would introduce radical change, leading to the empowerment of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Until the 1970s, the policy encouraged segregation. Most educators believed that children with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities were so different that they could not participate in the activities of a common school (Advani, 2002) [1]. Christian missionaries, in the 1880s, started schools for the disabled as charitable undertakings. The first school for the blind was established in 1887.

An institute for the deaf and mute, was set up in 1888. Services for the physically disabled were also initiated in the middle of the twentieth century. Individuals with mental retardation were the last to receive attention. The first school for the mentally challenged being established in 1934. Special education programmes in earlier times were, therefore, heavily dependent on voluntary initiative.

The government's (Department of Education) initiatives after independence were manifested in the establishment of a few workshop units meant primarily for blind adults (Luthra, 1974) ^[42]. These units later included people who were deaf, physically impaired, and mentally retarded. While some provisions existed in the States, it was considered the best course to assist and encourage voluntary organisations already working in the field the welfare approach continued in government programmes. Support was provided to voluntary organisations for the establishment of model schools for the blind, the deaf, and the mentally retarded. The government set up the National Library for the Blind, the Central Braille Press, and employment exchanges for the disabled. It also made provisions for scholarships, for prevention and early identification of disabling conditions, for the development of functional skills, and for aids and appliances for the disabled.

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 handicapped 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.

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

1. Barrier free access for all children with disabilities.
2. 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)
3. 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.
4. 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.

Major recommendations

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

Changing Role of Special Schools

Special schools have been set up in the past and provisions have been made for integrated education.

In 1947, India had a total of 32 such schools for the blind, 30 for the deaf, and three for the mentally retarded (Disability in India: www.ccdisabilities.nic.in). The number of such schools increased to around 3000 by the year 2000

(NCERT-UNESCO Regional Workshop Report, 2000). Thus India at present has what Pijl and Meijer (1991) refer to as “two tracks”. In other words, it has parallel but separate policies on segregation and integration. Special schools for children with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and locomotor disabilities are streamlined to follow a curriculum that is almost in line with the general education curriculum. The plus curriculum and the adaptation of instructional methodologies are followed where necessary. Children with mental retardation on the other hand require a specialised curriculum to meet their specific educational needs. Over time, however, there has been growing awareness that special education in special schools may be overly restrictive, and instead of working outside the mainstream classrooms, the special schools can work with, and provide support to, regular schools. Early in 1992, the Programme of Action, while promoting integrated education, had also suggested a Pragmatic Placement Principle. It postulated that learners with disabilities who can be educated in general schools should be educated in general schools, and those studying in special schools should be transferred to general schools once they are ready to make the shift (MHRD, Programme of Action, 1992). This was endorsed in 1994 by the Salamanca Statement (statement issued by the World Conference on Special Needs Education) recommendations for an alternative role for special schools. Hence, special schools in their newfound identity would become a far more flexible resource, by working in partnership with and creating a response to special needs, not only in the alternative form of provision and intervention, but within the mainstream classroom, curricula, and pedagogies. Special and general education, in other words, are gearing for a significant move to come closer together.

Briefly stated, the education of persons with disabilities in India has been recognised as an integral part of the educational system, hence, the policies and programmes adopted in recent years have been in accordance with this belief.

Inclusive Education

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) (2000), brought out by the NCERT, recommended inclusive schools for all without specific reference to pupils with SEN as a way of providing quality education to all learners. According to NCFSE: Segregation or isolation is good neither for learners with disabilities nor for general learners without disabilities. Societal requirement is that learners with special needs should be educated along with other learners in inclusive schools, which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practices (NCERT, 2000)

The NCFSE also recommended definitive action at the level of curriculum makers, teachers, writers of teaching-learning materials, and evaluation experts for the success of this strategy. This precipitated a revision of the IEDC scheme. This revision is in progress and has, to a certain extent, gained ground in the country. Internationally, until the end of 1980s, integration remained the main issue whenever discussions were held regarding the rights of disabled persons to an appropriate education. Whereas, in India, integration was a major reform of the 1970s, the need for inclusive education became evident from the fact that despite complete financial support under the IEDC scheme, for integrating learners with special needs into the

educational system, only 2–3% of the total population of these learners was actually integrated into the regular schools. Dissatisfaction with the progress towards integration, consideration of costs involved, and the advantages of an inclusive environment in bringing about increased acceptance of learners with SEN, led to demands for more radical change. The constant use of the medical model of assessment, wherein educational difficulties are explained solely in terms of defects in the child, led to a re-conceptualisation of the special needs (SN) task as requiring school reforms and improved pedagogy. This re-conceptualisation at the both the international and national level helped in the emergence of an orientation towards inclusive education. In the 1990s, inclusion captured the field after the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in 1994, with the adoption of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. This statement, which was adopted by the representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations in June 1994, has definitely set the policy agenda for inclusive education on a global basis (UNESCO, 1994) [51].

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. 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.

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