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Special education and inclusion: A meta-analysis of the three pivotal national educational policies in India

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Abstract

Different countries adopt different systems by considering the tradition and culture and adopt different stages during their life cycle at school and college education level to make it effective. If education remains an elusive dream for many of our citizens, we will have failed in our duty to create a just and equitable society, where every individual has the chance to succeed and contribute to the nation's growth and prosperity. Special education is no longer separated from mainstream education. India has also adopted a rights-based approach to incorporating children with special needs in education. The government of India after independence published three national educational policies. This is a qualitative paper highlighting these three policies towards special education, inclusion, and various initiatives through these three national educational policies. The paper has resolved, that in 1968, the policy primarily laid the foundation for special education. However, in 1986, a more comprehensive discussion of various aspects of special education took place, including the concept of integration in some cases. But in 2020 educational policy there was a particular emphasis on explaining how children with special needs can be integrated into mainstream education.

Keywords: Special education, inclusion, NPE 1968, NPE 1986, NEP 2020

Introduction

“Education is not a privilege, is a basic human right that should be accessible to all.”

Swami Vivekananda

Special education is no longer a privilege, it is the need of the hour. For any developing country education is the ultimate aspect of growth. In such times, neglecting special education will never allow complete development of a country. About 21 million (roughly around 2% of the population of India) are the disabled person in India, obtained through the latest population census and national sample survey organization's comprehensive surveys on disability. In the present circumstances, education is no longer an unattainable goal for the disadvantaged group. But is it same for children with special needs? UNESCO's (2012) revision of the international standard classification of education defines special needs education as, “Education designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meets learning objectives in an educational programme. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) disadvantages in physical, behavioural intellectual, emotional and social capacities. Educational programmes in special needs education may follow a similar curriculum as that offered in the parallel regular education system, however, they take individual's particular needs to account by providing specific resources (e.g., specially trained personal equipment or space) and if appropriate, modified educational content or learning objectives. These programmes can be offered for individual learners within already existing educational programmes, or be offered as a separate class in the same or separate educational institution” (p.83). Special education refers to a customized approach to teaching and supporting individuals with disabilities separately with specialized settings and individualized plans.

Objectives

To critically analyze the approaches towards special education, inclusion, and various initiatives outlined in three national educational policies in India.

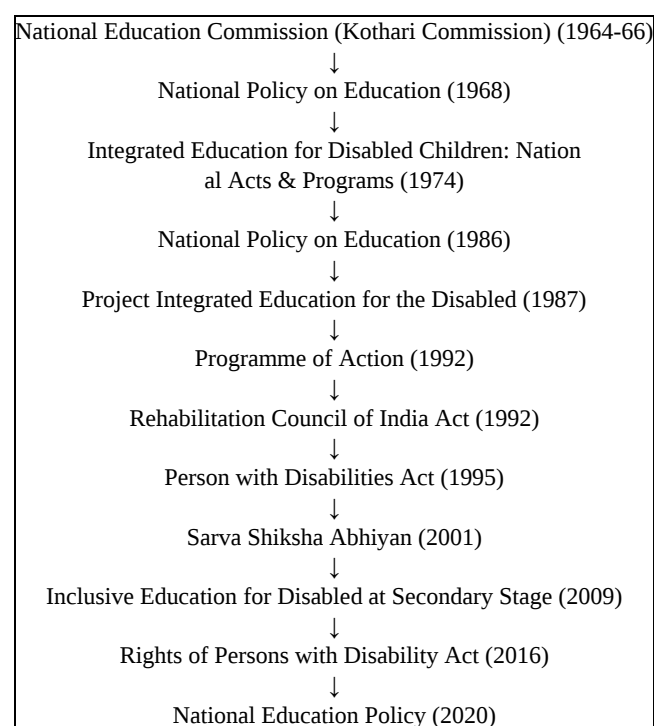
Methodology

In this research paper, a qualitative research design was used to utilize secondary data to explore the approaches to special education, inclusion, and related initiatives in three national education policies. Data were collected through an in-depth analysis of policy documents, reports, and existing literature.

International Scenario

In the global context, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1990 World Declaration for Education for All marked the beginning of the emphasis on education as a fundamental human right sixty years ago. Numerous international agreements, including the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006, the Convention Against Discrimination in 1960, and the Conventions for the Rights of Children in 1989—the first treaty created for child rights—promoted the need for high-quality opportunities. (Schuelka, Johnstone 2012) [8].

An overview of India



Special education in NPE 1968: The National Education Policy of 1968 was the first education policy of India. It was a pivotal policy document in India's history of educational reforms. It sought to address the nation's education challenges and lay the groundwork for the development of rebuts and an inclusive education system. It aimed to promote equality, access, and quality in education. The policy advocates for the focus on vocational and technical education, along with a commitment to the improvement of teacher training. It played a crucial role in shaping the direction of education in India, influencing subsequent policies and reforms. In the context of special education, this policy recognized the need to provide educational opportunities and support for education with disability. It recommended the establishment of special schools and resource centers to cater to the unique needs of these students.

Recommendation on special education: "Educational facilities for the physically and mentally handicap children should be made to develop integrated programmes enabling the handicap children to study in regular school" (NPE 1968, P.41) [13].

Special education in NPE 1986 (modified in 1992): The National Policy on

Education of 1986 was a landmark educational policy document in India. It represented a comprehensive blueprint for the development of the country's education system. This policy aimed to address various challenges and inequalities in the education sector, promoting access to quality education for all.

It recognized the importance of addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities and special needs. In the context of special education, NPE 1986 acknowledged the necessity of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream education whenever possible. The policy recommended the establishment of special schools and resource centers, teacher training programmes, and curriculum adoption to ensure that children with disability received the support and education they required. Whenever it is feasible, children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with the other (NPE 1986) [4]. This policy also sheds light on technical education for the handicapped. The policy stressed the importance of training regular teachers to work with children with special needs. The policy also highlighted the importance of research and development in the field of special education.

Special school: This policy states that to cater to the needs of about 2 million severely handicapped children, 10,000 special schools with 150-200 children each will be needed. As education in special schools is very costly it will be ensured that only those children whose needs cannot be met in common schools are enrolled in these schools. As soon as the disabled children enrolled in special schools acquire communication skills and study skills, they will be integrated into the common school. The capacity of the common schools to cater the needs of the disabled children will also improve (NPE 1986, POA 1992, P.117) [4].

Location for special school: Based on the population of disabled children, the reluctance of the parents to send children to schools located at distant places, sharing of specialist staff like therapists and psychologists to support the educational efforts, utilization of vocational and vocational courses of the Children in school as well as for post-education rehabilitation courses, meeting the needs of multiply handicapped children and the economic viability criteria the decision of establishing special school at the district and sub-district levels were stated (NPE 1986, POA 1992, P.120) [4].

Vocational training center: In every district where a special school is established, there will also be a vocational training center either integrated with the school or connected to it, which will offer vocational training to students attending the special schools and other individuals with severe disabilities to prepare them for employment (NPE 1986, POA 1992, P.120) [4].

Hostel for special needs children: Separate hostels for boys and girls are suggested. These hostels will separate the students in special schools and those in the vocational training center, with the boys' hostel having a capacity of 40 and the girls' hostel accommodating 20 individuals.

Teacher training for special schools: This policy suggested training of special teachers disability-wise under the Ministry of Human Resources Development and Ministry of Welfare through UGC, NCERT, Regional Colleges of Education, National Institute, National Institutes of Handicapped, and selected University Department of Special Education. Also discussed was the grant for teachers' training to the voluntary agencies. Besides teachers, 400 psychologists and at least 2 doctors in each district are needed for the task of assessment and rehabilitation of the handicapped Children.

Curriculum and assessment: The curriculum should be modified into account the specific learning problems arising out of a particular handicap. These children should not miss the curriculum component that they can. The National Institutes of Handicap and NCERT should develop the curriculum. Assessment must be flexible for severely disabled children.

Monitoring and evaluation: Suggested that the Ministry of Welfare and Ministry of Human Resources Development will monitor the progress of education of the handicapped in special schools and common schools respectively. MHRD and the Ministry of Welfare will conduct evaluation studies at different points in time through national initiatives like NCERT, NIEPA, etc.

Technical Education for Handicapped: Recommended sufficient funds to start special education and training programmes for the handicapped in selected institutions (NPE 1986, POA 1992, P.63)^[4].

Special Education in NPE 2020

Based on the recommendations of Kasturirangan Committee (2019), the National Education Policy has been formulated after 34 years. This is an extremely comprehensive policy that encompasses all levels of education. The policy is divided into four parts. These are-

- (i) School education
- (ii) Higher education
- (iii) Other key areas of focus
- (iv) Making it happen

Equitable an Inclusive Education: Learning for All is covered under (i) school education and Special Education is covered under Equitable an Inclusive Education: Learning for All.

NEP 2020 is adhering to the RPwD Act 2016. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 defines a person with a disability as, "A person with a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others." And person with benchmark disability is, "A person with not less than forty percent of a specified disability when specified disability has not been defined in measurable terms and includes a person with disability where specified disability has been defined in

measurable term, as certified by the certifying authority" (RPwD Act, 2016).

Emphasized inclusion: This education policy has given the most importance to inclusion than separate education. The policy said children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the foundational to higher education. For the integration of children with special educators with cross-disability training, and for the establishment of resource centers wherever needed, especially for children with severe or multiple disabilities. Schools and school complexes will support providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classrooms. Particularly assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools and teaching-learning materials will be made available to help children with disabilities integrate more easily into inclusive classrooms (NPE 2020, part I, section 6.12)^[5].

Home-based Schooling: Children with benchmark disabilities shall have the choice of regular or special schooling (section 6.12). For the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with sever or multiple disabilities resource center in conjunction with special educators will support and assist parents/guardians in achieving high-quality homeschooling and skilling for such students as needed. The orientation of the parents will be done for home-based schooling. Those who are severe and under home-based education also must be treated as equal to any other child in the general system. However, there should be an audit of home-based education for its efficiency and effectiveness using the principle of equity and equality of opportunity (NPE 2020, section 6.12)^[5].

Evaluation: For evaluation, this policy states that those who are in the benchmark disability, severe, or multiple disabilities category will be treated as any other child in the general system.

Also said about appropriate assessment and certification.

Three Indian education policies on special education:

Three Indian educational policy

NPE 1968: This policy emphasized the need for special educational **policy** services and programs for children with disabilities to ensure their inclusion and access to quality education. The NPE of 1968 laid some foundational principles for addressing the educational needs of children with special needs in India.

NPE 1986: It emphasized the need to provide equal educational opportunities for all, including children with special needs. the policy aimed to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream education system and promote inclusive education. it also encouraged the development of specialized education programs and services to cater to the unique needs of these children. This policy played a significant role in shaping the approach to special education in India.

NEP 2020: This policy introduced a progressive approach to special education. it emphasized inclusivity, aiming to ensure that children with disabilities receive quality

education with their peers. the policy promoted ECCE for all, recognizing the importance of an inclusive environment from as early as. encouraged the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools and the creation of a supportive atmosphere. It also suggests home-based schooling for severely disabled children. curriculum adaption and specialized teacher training were highlighted to ensure that children with disabilities could access and thrive in the education system.

Discussion

In 1968, the policy primarily laid the foundation for special education. However, in the 1986t policy, a more comprehensive discussion of various aspects of special education took place, including the concept of integration in some cases. But in the 2020 educational policy, there was a particular emphasis on explaining how children with special needs can be integrated into mainstream education. After studying these three educational policies it becomes clear that all three policies have strongly emphasized inclusion rather than separate schooling for special needs children.

Conclusion

“No person shall be deprived of his or her personal liberty only of ground of disability”

RPwD Act, 2016

Only separation of the child with special needs in a special school or placement in a mainstream school will not help. To foster our nation's development, it is our ethical obligation to ensure that education is within reach for every child, irrespective of their disabilities. India, is a country known for its diversity as opportunities. It's now essential for people to shift their perspective and view disabilities as unique abilities. Rather than focusing solely on what children with disabilities can't do, there's a need to recognize their strengths. The journey from separation to inclusion in India's education system has faced numerous challenges. To embrace disability as a special ability a change in mindset is required. The Indian government has undertaken several initiatives to help children with special needs. These three policies among them are notably mentioned in this paper. Particularly NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 emphasized and discussed in detail. If the recommendations of these policies are implemented correctly, a special segment of our country will not lag behind. Likewise, by working hand in hand and uniting with others, they will be able to contribute to the progress of the nation just like any other ordinary individual.

List of Acronyms

DEPwD: Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities

NCERT: National Council of Educational Research and Training

NEP 2020: National Education Policy 2020

NPE 1968: National Policy on Education 1968

NPE 1986: National Policy on Education 1986

POA: Programme of Action 1992

SSA: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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