



Policy framework for inclusive education: A systematic study

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a new educational philosophy and approach that promotes the idea that all students, irrespective of their ability or disability, should be capable of learning together in the same classroom setting. It advocates for special children with special needs to be educated alongside their peers in regular classrooms. It is founded on the belief that all students can learn and thrive in a supportive and diverse learning environment. Inclusive education aims to give all students equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from education regardless of individual differences or needs. One of the most important issues in education has emerged as inclusive education in almost every nation. As a result, the Indian government announced that it was changing its policies to encourage the inclusion of disabled learners in regular classrooms. The Indian government implies various policies and legislations to improve the quality of inclusive education from time to time. Every policy suggests some valuable recommendations for the betterment of inclusive education. This article provides systematic, detailed information about the policy framework from IEDC, 1974 to NEP, 2020, and their recommendations for inclusive education. This article also discusses the importance of all the policy framework for inclusive education that addresses how to improve the quality of inclusive education in India.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational approach that aims to give all students access to a high-quality education on an equal basis, regardless of their individual differences or learning needs. It values diversity, promotes equity, removes barriers to learning, and creates opportunities for all students to participate fully in the school community (Singh, 2016). Inclusive education recognizes that every student has unique strengths and challenges and aims to create a learning environment responsive to their needs. This approach involves removing barriers to learning, providing appropriate accommodations and support, and using teaching strategies tailored to students' diverse learning styles and abilities.

Inclusive education benefits all students, not just students with disabilities or special needs. It promotes positive attitudes towards diversity, helps to build a sense of community, and provides opportunities for students to learn from and support each other. It seeks to increase educational accessibility while fostering full participation and chances for all students to reach their potential. Cooperative learning and collective problem-solving techniques can accommodate all students' various learning styles without categorising them. Teacher education programmes should help instill positive attitudes in teachers and provide knowledge and skills for dealing with children with disabilities in regular classrooms (Kalgotra, 2019) ^[2].

One of the most important issues in education has emerged as inclusive education in almost every nation. When the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO) was published in 1994, many developing nations pledged to change their policies to support the inclusion of disabled students in regular classrooms.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a new philosophy and approach to education that promotes the idea that all students, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, should be capable of learning together in the same classroom environment. Inclusive education aims to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education by effectively addressing their various requirements in a responsive, acknowledging, respectful, and encouraging manner. It is conducted in a standard learning classroom where students of various backgrounds and abilities study together in a welcoming atmosphere. UNESCO defines inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (UNESCO, 2009) ^[8].

Inclusive education entails developing a learning environment that is open, flexible, and responsive to the needs of all students. This means that schools and teachers should be equipped with the resources, knowledge, and skills to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. There is no discrimination between exceptional and non-exceptional children. In an inclusive classroom, disabled learners and special needs are not segregated or separated from their peers. Instead, they are integrated into the regular classroom and provided the support and resources needed to succeed (Dash, 2018) ^[1]. Inclusive education also recognizes that diversity goes beyond disability and that students come from different backgrounds, cultures, and socio-economic status.

Target groups in inclusive Education

The target group in inclusive education refers to the specific group of individuals who are the focus of efforts to create an inclusive learning environment. Therefore, the target group in inclusive education includes diverse learners (sensory-motor, cognitive disabilities, mental health or behaviour issues, and differences in native language, culture, and background knowledge), students with disabilities, special educational needs, and other marginalized groups (women, youth and children residing in slums, others backward classes) who have historically been excluded from education. By targeting these specific groups, inclusive education ensures all students can learn and develop to their full potential. This approach recognizes that every student is unique and has different learning needs and seeks to provide individualized support and accommodations to help each student succeed. Inclusive education also acknowledges that the education system must be responsive to the diversity of the student population. It must consider factors such as culture, language, and socio-economic status. All students are ultimately the target group in inclusive education, with a focus on those who have historically been marginalised or excluded from the educational system.

Policy Framework for Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a complex and multifaceted concept encompassing many ideas and approaches. Thus, the government of India advocated the implementation of inclusive education supported by various relevant policies, legal enactments, schemes, programs, and plans. These are given below.

Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC, 1974)

The Ministry of Welfare, Central Government of India, began this programme in 1974. Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was established to facilitate the education of children with disabilities in general education classrooms and to offer them equal opportunities. This programme offers financial assistance for school supplies, uniforms, books, school supplies, special equipment, and aids. To implement this programme in regular schools, the state government contributes 50% of the funding.

National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986)

The Government of India launched the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986 to encourage education among Indians. This policy places a special emphasis on eliminating inequalities and ensuring that all Indian women, members of Scheduled Tribes, and members of Scheduled Castes have equal access to educational opportunities. All children, irrespective of their disabilities, should have access to education, and the system should be reorganised to meet their needs, according to the recommendation.

Some of the specific recommendations made in the NPE 1986 on inclusive education include:

1. Providing appropriate educational opportunities for disabled children, such as access to special schools, integrated education, and vocational training.
2. Establishing barrier-free environments in colleges and schools to make it easier for disabled students to participate in all facets of school life.
3. Special education training for teachers to assist them in meeting the requirements of every student, regardless of disabilities.
4. iv. Giving students with disabilities access to the right technologies and assistive devices to support their learning.
5. Sensitization of the general public to the needs and potential of children with disabilities to promote a more inclusive society.
6. The NPE of 1986 acknowledged that the educational system should be developed to meet the various needs of students. This implies that the system must be adaptable enough to meet the needs of students with various learning preferences, aptitudes, and disabilities.
7. The policy emphasized the importance of early identification (screening programs) and intervention for children with disabilities.
8. The policy also emphasized the need for adequate resources to support the education of children with disabilities.

Rehabilitation Council of India Act (RCI, 1992)

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act of 1992 is a significant piece of legislation that aims to promote the rehabilitation and education of disabled people in India. The Act recognises the significance of inclusive education in promoting the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is in charge of promoting and coordinating the development of rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, as well as creating training policies and programs for rehabilitation professionals. It encourages investigation into special education and rehabilitation. A National Council for

Rehabilitation is also created by the Act, and it promotes the involvement of people with disabilities in decision-making processes pertaining to their own rehabilitation.

The Right to Education Act, 2009

RTE (Right to Education) was passed into law in India in 2009 with the intention of giving all children between the ages of 6 and 14 access to free and mandatory education. The RTE Act emphasizes the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their social, economic, or physical backgrounds. The RTE Act also emphasizes the importance of inclusive education by requiring that every child be admitted to a school in their neighbourhood, as well as that schools provide necessary support and facilities to children with disabilities. In addition, the act requires that schools have trained teachers who can provide specialized instruction and support to children with disabilities.

The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act, 1995)

The Person with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 is the most important piece of special education legislation in India's history. The PWD Act provided for the economic and educational rehabilitation of disabled people. This legislation was passed in order to protect the rights of disabled people and guarantee their full inclusion in society. The act provides for the protection of the rights of disabled persons and prohibits discrimination against them in all areas of life, including education. It mandates that appropriate free education be offered to children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years old. Additionally, all educational institutions must offer inclusive education to children with disabilities and adapt the curriculum to meet their needs under this law.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2001-02)

This programme was started in 2001 with the goal of providing universal access to education for all children between the age of 6 and 14 by 2010, with an emphasis on children from underprivileged backgrounds and those with disabilities. The program provides financial support to states to improve the infrastructure and resources available in schools and to train teachers in inclusive education practices. The SSA also intends to provide special training and assistance to disabled children in order for them to fully participate in the educational system.

National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005)

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 is an excellent example of inclusive curriculum. The framework emphasizes the need for inclusive education, which means that all children should have access to education regardless of their gender, caste, class, ethnicity, language, disability, or other differences. This framework acknowledges that India is a diverse country with a large population and that the education system should meet the needs of all students. The framework suggests that the curriculum should be flexible, child-centered, and activity-based to accommodate different learning styles and abilities.

The NCF 2005 emphasizes the need for teacher training in inclusive education, which involves understanding the needs of diverse learners and adapting teaching methods and resources accordingly. It also recommends the use of assistive technologies and other resources to support learners

with disabilities. It suggests the role of schools and teachers in creating an inclusive environment where all learners feel valued and respected.

The National Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD, 2005)

The National Action Plan for Inclusive Education was launched in 2005 as a comprehensive policy to promote inclusive education in India. The plan focuses on providing equal opportunities for education to all children, including those with disabilities, and addressing the barriers to their inclusion in mainstream schools. The plan provides for the development of inclusive curriculum, teacher training, and support for the creation of barrier-free infrastructure and accessible learning materials.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006

The goal of this policy is to empower and include people with disabilities in all facets of life, including education. It also recognises their legal rights. The policy emphasises the need for adequate training for teachers and administrators in inclusive education practices and recognises that people with disabilities are a valuable resource for the nation. It aims to create a barrier-free environment in educational institutions that gives them equal opportunities to perform their duties and awareness to enjoy their rights equally.

Right to Education Act, 2009

In 2009, RTE (Right to Education) was enacted in India, which aimed to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 to 14. One of the key principles of the RTE Act is inclusive education, which emphasizes the need to provide equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their social, economic, or physical background.

The Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS, 2009)

This scheme was launched in 2009 to provide financial support to schools to provide inclusive education to disabled children at the secondary level. The scheme provides support for the development of assistive devices and teaching aids, as well as for the training of teachers in inclusive education practices. The IEDSS also aims to provide vocational training to disabled children to enable them to become self-sufficient.

The Model School Scheme for Persons with Disabilities (2012)

The Model School Scheme for Persons with Disabilities was established in 2012 to provide quality education to disabled children. The goal of the scheme is to establish model schools for disabled children, complete with the necessary infrastructure, resources, and trained staff to provide inclusive education. The programme also offers financial assistance for the development of assistive devices and other resources.

The Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities (2014)

In 2014, the Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities was established to provide financial assistance to students with disabilities pursuing higher education. The scholarship is available to students with disabilities who have a minimum of 40% disability and are pursuing undergraduate, postgraduate, or doctoral degrees. The scholarship covers

tuition fees, maintenance allowance, and other expenses related to education.

Right of Persons with Disability Act (RPWD, 2016) ^[7]

The Indian Parliament passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) 2016 as a significant piece of legislation to safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities in India. It replaced the PWD Act, of 1995. The RPWD Act 2016 recognizes 21 types of disabilities, namely low vision, blindness, hearing impairment, dwarfism, intellectual disability, locomotor disability, autism, and multiple disabilities. The Act provides for several measures to ensure that disabled people have equal opportunities and access to education, employment, healthcare, and other services. It also provides for the establishment of special courts and tribunals to address grievances related to the rights of people with disabilities.

The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018) ^[10]

The Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, an integrated programme for school education from preschool to senior secondary levels, was introduced in 2018. The program's goal is to provide a high-quality, equitable education for all students, including those with disabilities, by providing the necessary infrastructure, teaching aids, free textbooks, uniforms, and trained teachers. Additionally, the programme supports the development of creative approaches to inclusive education and the promotion of local language instruction.

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) ^[11]

The National Education Policy (NEP) is a comprehensive policy that aims to transform the education system in India. The policy emphasizes the need for inclusive education and proposes several measures to achieve this, such as the creation of special education zones, the provision of assistive technology and devices, and the inclusion of disability studies in the curriculum. The NEP also aims to provide flexible learning options and support for disabled children to enable them to participate fully in the education system.

Importance of policy framework for Inclusive Education

Here are some important reasons why such a policy framework is important for inclusive education.

1. Policy framework promotes equity by ensuring that all students have equal access to education, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.
2. It supports diversity by recognizing and celebrating the unique strengths and abilities of all students.
3. It encourages collaboration between teachers, students, families, and community members to support the success of all students.
4. It gives educators, administrators, and other stakeholders clear guidelines to make sure that everyone is pursuing the same objectives.
5. It helps to promote accountability by setting clear standards and expectations for schools and teachers for supplying an excellent education for all types of students, including disabled children.
6. Inclusive education policy frameworks boost academic results for all students, including those with disabilities, by encouraging a more student-centered method of instruction that emphasises individual needs and strengths.
7. It helps to increase social inclusion by promoting a

culture of acceptance and understanding to break down barriers and stereotypes in the society.

8. It contributes to the development of a positive educational atmosphere where all students feel respected and appreciated by encouraging a sense of community and shared responsibility.
9. It supports teacher professional development by providing training and resources to help educators meet the needs of all students. This helps to build capacity within the education system and ensures that teachers have the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.
10. It promotes human rights by recognizing the right of all individuals to an education. This helps to ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has access to the same opportunities and resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a policy framework for inclusive education is essential for promoting equity, supporting diversity, encouraging collaboration, providing clear guidelines, and ensuring accountability. Such a framework helps to design a more inclusive and welcoming conducive learning environment for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Overall, a policy framework for inclusive education is important for improving educational outcomes, increasing social inclusion, building a positive school culture, supporting teacher professional development, and promoting human rights. These benefits are important not just for students with disabilities, but for all students and for society as a whole. In the future, the government of India has taken more innovative policies, schemes, legal enactment, program, and plans for the betterment of inclusive education.

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