

Inclusive Education and Digital Learning: From the NEP Perspective

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Abstract

One of the key objectives of the 2030 Sustainable development goals is to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education for all people, regardless of their skills, qualities, and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The National Education Policy's (NEP 2020) introduction in this context paves the way for inclusive practises in mainstream education. In order to evaluate the success of integrating digital learning in inclusive education while looking at it from a NEP viewpoint, this research analyses secondary materials. From obtaining study materials to receiving comments and evaluations to accelerating the learning process, ICT may play a significant role in teaching and learning. By critically examining our New Education Policy and its effects, this article primarily focuses on how technology helps to make inclusive education more accessible and equal for everyone. The results of this study will serve as a foundation for future research, giving vital insights into how inclusive education is seen from a NEP perspective and how digital learning fits into it.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Digital learning, NEP, ICT

Introduction

In today's fast evolving educational system, the concept of inclusive education has gained more attention which aims at providing equitable quality education for all people, regardless of their skills, qualities, and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The focus on inclusive education has become more pronounced with the implementation of New Education Policy (NEP), whose motto is to make education equitable and inclusive. The advancement of people and nations depends on education. Additionally, the impact of education on personal development in India may be readily seen if we compare the pre- and post-independence eras. In

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order to create successful and developed citizens in all spheres, the country's educational system must provide students with the knowledge and skills they will need in the future. The Indian government has suggested a new education policy in 2020, which would be the first one in 34 years. The Ancient Indian Gurukul System's organisational principles were closely incorporated into the NEP 2020 and substantially inspired it (Pawan, 2020). Since 1960, UNESCO has prioritised inclusiveness in education, and additional international human rights agreements have been made since 1948 (Hodkinson, 2016). Diverse approaches are used to promote inclusive education and different conceptions of inclusion exist. Some others view it as a placement issue and instead use the word "integration" in place of "inclusion." To satisfy the requirements of children with challenges of any kind in general education classes, these strategies emphasis traditional approaches (Nilholm and Göransson 2017). However, it is hard to define inclusive education solely in terms of a place or a collection of practises because such definitions can be altered by changes in educational practise, context, culture, and other factors that quickly make such characteristics outdated and unnecessary (Forlin et al. 2013). Digital learning, with its rapid advancement in recent years, has emerged as a powerful tool in promoting inclusive education. The integration of technology in the classroom can address various challenges faced by students with diverse learning needs. The advancement of e-learning is also influenced by the digital world, which enhances it with new tools and techniques. Additionally, e-learning is highly demanded for its benefits in addressing significant societal issues, particularly in addressing the disparity in physical capacities of students (Martins & Nunes, 2016a). By examining the key principles of the NEP and the potential of digital learning tools, this study seeks to shed light on the opportunities and challenges presented by the integration of inclusive education and digital learning

Phases of new education policy

The phases of the new education policy are separated into four. It has been fully eliminated under the new policy. The old education policy was based on a 10 + 2 formula, but the new education policy is based on a 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 formula. The new programme includes three years of schooling followed by twelve years of schooling. The new policy has been made mandatory for both government and non-government organizations (Verma & Kumar, 2021). There are four steps of new education policy, the foundational stage, preparatory stage, middle stage, secondary stage.

Foundational stage: The Foundation Stage of the New Education Policy includes children aged 3 to 8 years. The Foundation Stage is set to last 5 years. In which three years of pre-school education will be provided in Anganwadi and class one and two school education will be provided, with the language skills and skill level of the pupils being reviewed and focused on improvement (Verma & Kumar, 2021).

Preparatory stage: This stage's time is preserved for three years. Children aged 8 to 11 are included in this stage. In which he will have youngsters up to the fifth grade. At this stage of the new education policy, additional emphasis will be placed on improving pupils' numerical skills. At the same time, all children will get instruction in the regional language. In addition, children will be taught physics, art, mathematics, and other subjects through experiments (Verma & Kumar, 2021).

Middle stage: The duration of this stage has been set at three years. Children from 6th through 8th grade have been included in this stage, where subject-based curriculum will be taught, and coding will begin with the children in 6th grade. At the same time, all children will be provided opportunities for vocational assessment and vocational internship, with the goal of making the children qualified for employment just during their school education (Verma & Kumar, 2021).

Secondary stage: This stage lasts for four years. This level is in the ninth grade. Students in the 12th grade are included. This will include rigorous study of the subjects. The educational curriculum of 8th to 12th grade courses has also been initiated at this point, as has the alternative educational course. Students can choose their studies based on their interests rather than those of a specific stream. Students now can choose their disciplines under the new education policy (Verma & Kumar, 2021).

Opportunities of NEP, 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Government of India, presents a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming the education system. The NEP 2020 provides the groundwork for less regulation and more autonomy for institutions by establishing a strong self-regulatory framework. The New Education Policy's emphasis extends beyond degrees. It is critical to emphasis life skills and vocational education. The key features of NEP could be marked as the educational hub, handling a smaller number of students, promoting student engagement in class and internship opportunities. India has a lot of potential as an international educational center to attract global students and universities. The cost of education in India is lower than in many other countries. The teacher-to-student ratio should be kept as low as possible to properly monitor students' development. Reduced teacher-to-student ratio will surely improve instructors' efficiency. Through peer learning, experiential learning, and other methods, students will be better equipped in the classroom with KSA knowledge, skills, and attitude. Internships give students with real-world experience, allowing them to become capable of implementing their theories in the real world and understanding competitiveness (Chowdhury, 2023).

Inclusive Education in NEP,2020

After 34 years, the National Education Policy was released based on the advice of the Kasturirangan Committee (2019). This is a comprehensive policy that covers all levels of schooling. The policy was divided into four sections. inclusive and equitable School education is covered by the NEP (2020). NEP 2020 is consistent with the RPwD Act of 2016. According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016, inclusive education is a "system of education in which 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" (RPwD Act, 2016). The RPwD act also confirmed the provision of free education for disabled children up to the age of 18 in a suitable environment. The RPwD act also extended the 3% reservation to 5% for people with baseline disabilities in all government higher education institutions. The inclusive education provides avenues for Life skill development and the parents and teachers plays a pivotal role for the life skill development (Babu, 2018). Hence through the inclusive education in NEP,2020 can lead to the skill enhancement of students.

Five aspects of inclusive education

- 1) Positive Attitude:** One of the most fundamental impediments to inclusion is attitude. As a pillar of the educational system, teachers can influence students' attitudes towards inclusive education. This necessitates not only sensitization of teachers to inclusion, but also well-trained teachers for inclusion. NEP 2020 discusses modifications to teacher education programmes to instill the principles and skills essential for inclusive education (Panigrahi et al.,2020).
- 2) School Preparedness:** Inclusive education can only be successful if the school is adequately equipped to meet the needs of disabled children. The NEP 2020 prioritizes school readiness. A resource facility at each school complex, as well as the employment of special educators and individualized support programmes, are parts of school readiness for inclusion (Panigrahi et al.,2020).
- 3) Resources and Support:** Individually tailored assistive, supporting, and other services must be offered in the school. When it comes to assisting NEP 2020, they have a specific plan. The resource centre assists both the school and home-schooling parents. The state must provide support to both the school and the parents for great education to be provided (Panigrahi et al.,2020).
- 4) Individualized Program:** No two children are the same, and no two disabled children are the same. As a result, each challenged child with distinct disabilities has unique needs. When it comes to designing educational programmes for these children, one size does not fit all. The school is required by NEP 2020 to provide individualized programmes for these pupils (Panigrahi et al.,2020).

- 5) **Flexible Curriculum:** These children have extremely different needs and abilities than their peers, which is why we can't force them to learn what their peers are learning. That is why a flexible curriculum and a flexible assessment process are critical to the success of these students. NEP 2020 not only mentions a flexible curriculum, but also PARAKH for easy assessment (Panigrahi et al.,2020)

Digital learning and its significance to inclusive education

Digital learning plays a vital role in advancing the principles of inclusive education, making it a powerful tool for promoting equitable access and enhancing learning outcomes for all students. Assistive technologies and adaptive devices enable students with mobility, visual, auditory, or communication impairments to engage with educational materials, participate in activities, and express their knowledge. This inclusive approach promotes equal opportunities and empowers students to actively participate in the educational process. ICT and related technologies have created new opportunities for potential of the human race. The ICT's capability, mobility, accessibility, and cost have all increased over time (Mitrovic, 2013). More than 40 million students worldwide already use online learning as a means of instruction, demonstrating the growing acceptance of e-learning (Crea & Sparnon, 2017). The benefits of e-learning in educational systems of many nations were also intended to address the issues of people with disabilities, particularly with regard to the advancement of inclusive education. A new step in educational development, inclusive education ensures accessibility for students with disabilities by modifying it to their unique needs. The growth of inclusive education in the current environment is mostly due to the rise in the population of disabled people. As a result, the World Health Organisation estimates that there are more than 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide, or 23% of the world's total population (Meskhi et al., 2019). However, every strategy for inclusive education is predicated on the social concept of integrating people with disabilities into relationships with others (Armstrong & Barton, 2007). By utilising technology, we can provide inclusive learning environments that go beyond physical limitations, offer fair access to education, and support personalised instruction. Through the continuous evolution of educational practices and the thoughtful integration of digital technologies, we can collectively pave the way for a brighter and more inclusive future of education.

Social Work Dimensions of Inclusive Education

Every child has the right to equal access to education, but for kids with special needs, this right is at risk since there aren't the supports and services in place to ensure that the right to education is protected. The significance of school social workers has been highlighted by the changing context of education and disability. Since school takes up a significant portion of a child's time, it is important that the learning environment be one in which

students can advance academically, socially, and emotionally. Social workers may be extremely important in ensuring that this type of setting is provided for all children, including those who have special needs (Tariq et al., 2020). School social workers not only provide their services just to schools but also work inside and outside the school by offering services to families and communities (Mills, 2003). A social worker may represent a specific case, known as case advocacy, such as caring for a child with special needs. Or, advocating could be conducted on a bigger scale, known as cause advocacy, which entails changing policies or programmes to bring about social change and justice for a greater segment of society (Dalrymple&Boylan, 2013). The role of a social worker in promoting inclusiveness is crucial in creating a more equitable and just society. Social workers work with individuals, families, communities, and institutions to address social problems, advocate for marginalized populations, and promote social justice.

Conclusion

The NEP's focus on holistic development, flexibility, and accessibility aligns with the opportunities presented by digital learning, creating a synergistic relationship that can revolutionize the educational environment. The use of digital platforms also enables global connections, exposing students to diverse perspectives and promoting cultural understanding. In essence, digital learning holds great promise in advancing the principles of inclusive education as envisioned by the NEP. By exploiting the power of technology and adhering to the NEP's vision of inclusive, learner-centric education, we can create educational ecosystems that foster equitable access, personalized learning experiences, and holistic development for all learners.

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