



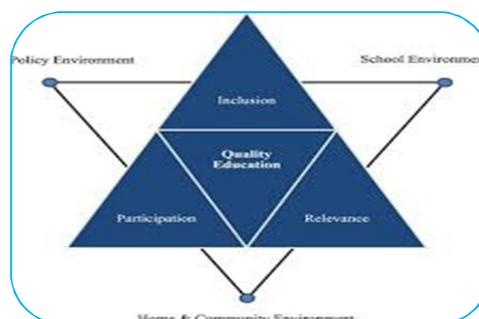
## INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING NEP-2020'S EMPHASIS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Inclusion and equity have emerged as central pillars in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in multicultural and socio-economically diverse societies like India. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant paradigm shift by placing equitable access and inclusive learning at the core of educational reform. The policy recognizes education as a tool for social justice and aims to ensure that learners from all socio-economic backgrounds, including marginalized and disadvantaged groups, receive quality education. This paper examined the conceptual foundations of inclusion and equity, analyses NEP-2020's provisions for inclusive education, and discusses implementation strategies, challenges, and future directions. The study highlights that NEP-2020 seeks to transform education into a system that promotes participation, dignity, and equal opportunity for every learner.*



**KEYWORDS:** National Education Policy 2020, Inclusion, Equity, Inclusive Education, SEDGs, Educational Policy, Social Justice.

### INTRODUCTION:

Education plays a transformative role in creating an equitable and democratic society. In India, disparities based on gender, caste, socio-economic status, disability, and geography have historically affected access to quality education. The National Education Policy 2020 identifies education as a powerful instrument for achieving social justice and equality and emphasizes inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners. The policy aligns with global commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Thus, inclusion and equity are not merely supplementary goals but foundational principles guiding educational reform in India. India is a land of extraordinary diversity — hundreds of languages, varied cultures, multiple learning contexts, and socio-economic realities that are deeply layered. In one classroom, we may find a first-generation learner, a child from a migrant family, a learner with special needs, and a digital-native student — all learning together.

Yet, we must acknowledge uncomfortable truths. Educational access and outcomes have historically been shaped by social and economic divides. Many learners continue to face barriers not because they lack ability, but because opportunities remain unequal. The policy introduces a powerful idea — equity over uniformity.

Equality says: give all students the same textbook.

Equity says: give each learner the support they need to succeed.

NEP, 2020 boldly identifies Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and commits to targeted interventions so that education becomes inclusive not only in vision but in practice. This is precisely where NEP 2020 becomes transformative. It recognizes that equity is not about giving everyone the same ladder; it is about ensuring that every learner has a fair chance to climb.

### **Main Objectives of the Study**

The paper is based on the following objectives:

- To understand the concepts of inclusion and equity in education.
- To analyse NEP-2020's vision and provisions regarding inclusive and equitable education.
- To examine policy initiatives targeting Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).
- To identify implementation strategies and challenges in achieving educational equity.
- To suggest measures for strengthening inclusive education practices in India.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The present study followed a descriptive research design to analyse the concept of inclusion and equity in education with special reference to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study is primarily conceptual and policy-oriented, focusing on understanding policy provisions, educational frameworks, and implementation strategies related to inclusive education in India.

### **Nature of the Study**

This research is analytical and exploratory in nature. It explores how NEP-2020 emphasizes inclusion and equity and examines the policy's potential to address educational disparities among diverse learner groups. The study does not involve experimental intervention but relies on interpretation and critical analysis of existing literature and policy documents.

### **Sources of Data**

The study is based on secondary data, collected from reliable and authentic sources, including:

- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 document
- Ministry of Education reports and policy briefs
- UDISE+ and AISHE statistical reports
- Government publications related to inclusive education
- Research articles, journals, books, and conference papers
- Reports from educational organizations and official websites

These sources provide theoretical insights as well as statistical evidence related to inclusion and equity in education.

### **Data Collection Method**

Data were collected through document analysis and content review. Policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature were systematically examined to identify:

- Key themes of inclusion and equity
- Policy provisions for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)
- Strategies proposed under NEP-2020
- Existing challenges in implementation

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. Major themes emerging from policy documents and literature were categorized into:

- Conceptual understanding of inclusion and equity

- Policy initiatives under NEP-2020
- Institutional mechanisms and support systems
- Implementation challenges and recommendations

This method helped in interpreting the policy emphasis and understanding its implications for educational practice.

### Scope and Delimitations

The study is limited to:

- Analysis of inclusion and equity within the framework of NEP-2020
- Secondary data and policy-based interpretation
- Indian educational context only

Primary field data, surveys, or interviews were not conducted, which limits empirical generalization but allows deeper conceptual analysis.

### Significance of the Methodology

The chosen methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of policy intent and educational implications without requiring field-based experimentation. It helps in critically examining how NEP-2020 positions inclusion and equity as foundational principles for transforming the Indian education system.

## INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

### Inclusion in Education

Inclusion refers to creating learning environments where all learners—regardless of disability, gender, language, social identity, or economic background—participate fully in educational processes. It focuses on removing barriers that prevent meaningful participation.

NEP 2020 underscores the need for inclusive education by acknowledging the diverse learning needs of students, including those with disabilities. The policy promotes the creation of support structures and accommodations within higher education institutions to ensure inclusivity for all learners. NEP-2020 advocates a “whole school approach” that supports children with special needs through teacher training, resource centres, and inclusive pedagogies.

### Equity in Education

Equity differs from equality. While equality means giving everyone the same resources, equity ensures that learners receive support according to their specific needs. NEP-2020 identifies equity as one of its five guiding pillars alongside access, quality, affordability, and accountability. NEP 2020 acknowledges and seeks to address historical disparities by providing targeted scholarships and financial aid to economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups. The policy also recognizes the importance of promoting regional languages as mediums of instruction, thus making education more accessible to non-English-speaking populations.

### 1. NEP-2020 and its Vision for Inclusive Education

NEP-2020 envisions an education system rooted in social justice and equal opportunity. The policy introduces several measures:

#### - Focus on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

The policy introduces the term SEDGs to include learners affected by social, economic, gender, geographical, and disability-related disadvantage.

#### - Gender Inclusion Fund

To address gender disparities, NEP-2020 proposes a Gender Inclusion Fund aimed at supporting girls and transgender learners in accessing quality education.

### - **Inclusion of Children with Special Needs (CWSN)**

NEP-2020 recommends inclusive classrooms, special educators, accessible infrastructure, and adaptive learning materials to ensure equal participation of children with disabilities.

### - **Multilingual and Flexible Learning**

The policy encourages instruction in local languages and flexible curricular pathways, enabling diverse learners to engage meaningfully with education.

## **2. Institutional and Policy Support for Equity**

### - **Samagra Shiksha Scheme**

Aligned with NEP-2020, Samagra Shiksha aims to ensure equitable and inclusive classroom environments by bridging social and gender gaps and supporting holistic development.

### - **Higher Education Equity**

In higher education, the policy emphasizes equitable access, scholarships, and targeted fellowships for marginalized communities

## **3. Statistical Perspective (Indicative Data)**

- According to UDISE+ 2021-22, approximately 22.66 lakh children with **special needs** were enrolled from pre-primary to Class XII, highlighting the scale of inclusion required in school education.
- UDISE+ data reports over 26 crore total school enrolments, showing the magnitude of the Indian education system and the importance of equity-focused interventions.
- AISHE reports indicate continuing efforts toward improving access, participation, and inclusion in higher education. As per the AISHE 2021–22 report, female students outnumber male students in undergraduate enrolment in India. Female enrolment in higher education reached 2.07 crore in 2021–22, making up 48% of total enrolment. These statistics reflect both progress and the need for sustained policy implementation.

## **4. Challenges in Achieving Inclusion and Equity**

Despite progressive policies, several challenges still:

### **1. Infrastructure barriers in rural and remote areas**

One of the foremost challenges facing NEP 2020 is the effective Infrastructure barriers in rural and remote areas. Transitioning from the existing system to the envisioned changes in higher education demands meticulous planning, infrastructure development, and faculty training, which may be slow and complex.

### **2. Shortage of trained inclusive educators**

Preparing trained inclusive educators to teach in multiple languages, adapt to new pedagogical approaches, and support diverse learners requires extensive training and development efforts.

### **3. Digital divide and unequal access to technology**

NEP 2020's emphasis on digital education, while commendable, exacerbates the digital divide in a country with varying levels of internet penetration and technology access. Ensuring equitable access to online resources remains a daunting task.

### **4. Socio-cultural biases and gender stereotypes**

Overcoming deeply ingrained cultural and societal biases related to caste, gender, and disability is an ongoing challenge in creating an inclusive higher education environment.

### **5. Equity in Scholarships and Financial Aid**

While NEP 2020 advocates for targeted scholarships and financial aid, ensuring that these benefits reach the most economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups and are sufficient to bridge the equity gap is a considerable challenge.

### **6. Implementation gaps between policy and practice**

These challenges requires coordinated action among policymakers, educators, and communities.

### **5. Strategies for Effective Implementation**

To strengthen NEP-2020's inclusive vision, the following strategies are suggested:

### **1. Continuous teacher training in inclusive pedagogy**

Develop a comprehensive implementation plan for teacher training in inclusive pedagogy that outlines the specific steps, responsibilities, timelines, and resource allocations required to analyse NEP-2020's vision and provisions regarding inclusive and equitable education.

### **2. Strengthening school resource centres and support systems**

Resource Centres serve as hubs for professional development, curriculum support, and specialized instruction. They provide training for teachers on inclusive practices, early intervention, and life skills development, while also offering materials and coaching to neighboring schools. These centres are most effective when integrated into district-based support teams, allowing for coordinated efforts and resource sharing across schools. Give Strengthening school resource centres and make a effective support system in the Indian higher education.

### **3. Data-driven monitoring of inclusion indicators**

Invest in improving digital infrastructure, including internet connectivity in rural and underserved areas. Provide affordable or subsidized devices and data plans to bridge the digital divide.

### **4. Community participation and parental awareness**

Launch awareness campaigns for parental involvement to promote NEP 2020's goals of equity, and inclusion among communities, educators, and students. Encourage community involvement in education planning and decision-making.

### **5. Technology-enabled accessible learning resources**

Provide affordable or subsidized devices and data plans to bridge the digital divide. Invest in improving digital infrastructure, including internet connectivity in rural and underserved areas. Increased financial allocation for disadvantaged groups.

### **6. Inclusive Policies for International Students**

Develop policies and support mechanisms that facilitate the inclusion of international students, ensuring that they have access to affordable education and are welcomed into the Indian higher education system.

### **7. Gender Equity Initiatives**

Implement gender-sensitive policies and programs to address gender disparities in higher education, including promoting women's participation in STEM fields and leadership roles.

NEP-2020 moves beyond traditional notions of access and recognizes that true educational development requires equity and inclusion as systemic principles. The policy attempts to shift the educational paradigm from uniformity to diversity-sensitive learning environments. By integrating social justice with educational quality, NEP-2020 positions education as a means of national development and democratic empowerment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Inclusion and equity are central to the transformative vision of NEP-2020. The policy emphasizes that education must serve as a tool for reducing social inequalities and ensuring equal participation for all learners. While significant policy mechanisms have been introduced, successful realization depends on effective implementation, teacher preparedness, and sustained institutional commitment. If implemented effectively, NEP-2020 has the potential to reshape Indian education into a truly inclusive system that reflects constitutional values of justice, equality, and dignity. The future of India will be written in the confidence of a child who finally feels included, in the courage of a girl who continues her education, in the voice of a learner who realizes that education belongs to them too. A compassionate approach from institutional leaders, educators, and faculty members toward students from marginalized backgrounds can drive transformative changes in both the campus environment and the classroom, promoting equity and inclusion.

**If NEP 2020 is the vision, we must be the action.  
If inclusion is the goal, equity must be our path.**

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