

Fostering an Inclusive Classroom Culture: A Perspective of NEP-2020

Samima Khatun* and **Mohd Shakir****

*Research Scholar, Department of Education, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Email ID: samimavb93@gmail.com

**Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP-202002 (INDIA) Email [ID: aligarhshakir@gmail.com](mailto:aligarhshakir@gmail.com)

Abstract

The objectives of this study are to explore various strategies and approaches that teachers can use in the classroom to promote an inclusive environment in line with the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The paper also aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of inclusion in the classroom. As well as analysing an inclusive classroom culture that is capable of playing an influential role in the overall academic and social development of students. Moreover, through a detailed analysis of the NEP 2020, the paper highlights various strategies and approaches that, if properly implemented, will enable teachers to create a more inclusive learning environment by adopting a student-centred approach to teaching, using diverse instructional methods to address individual learner needs, encouraging meaningful interaction among students from varied backgrounds, and nurturing mutual respect and understanding. This paper also explores the challenges that teachers may face in implementing these strategies, such as a lack of resources or limited training in inclusive teaching methods, plus limited support from school administration. The study also provided suggestions on how to overcome the challenges. Overall, the paper aims to equip teachers with the tools and resources they require to create an inclusive classroom culture that will assist the academic and social development of all students, regardless of their background or ability. It also highlights the challenges that teachers may face, which can be overcome through appropriate tools and resources.

Keywords: Fostering, Inclusive, Classroom Culture, Challenges, Strategies, Teacher, National Education Policy 2020.

Introduction:

Creating an inclusive classroom environment is essential to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equal access to education. The approach to inclusion in the Indian education system has evolved significantly over time through various initiatives and policies. The most recent effort to address these challenges in a comprehensive way is the National Education Policy 2020. To fully understand its transformative potential, it is important to consider the historical context and earlier educational policies and initiatives that came before it:

National Policy on Education 1968: Advocating for a consistent education system aiming at national unification and cultural harmony, the Education Policy of 1968 represented a turning point in Indian educational reform (Government of India, 1968). Although it laid the groundwork for later reforms, the strategy did not specifically address inclusion; instead, it placed more emphasis on increasing educational access than on fostering inclusive learning

environments (Bhattacharya, 2014). But, the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986: In an effort to integrate learners with diverse needs into mainstream schools, the NPE 1986 established the concept of “integrated education.” which was a notable advancement (Government of India, 1986). Notwithstanding these initiatives, the policy’s execution was hindered by a lack of funding and insufficient teacher preparation. Although NPE 1986 sought to promote diversity, research by Kumar and Sinha (2012) found that these pragmatic limitations hampered the programme’s impact. Additionally, the 1992 Programme of Action (POA): Expanding upon the NPE 1986, the POA 1992 aimed to operationalise its goals through enhancements in curriculum changes, teacher preparation, and educational infrastructure (Government of India, 1992). It is observed that the POA 1992 went short in addressing the practical needs for inclusive education, frequently emphasising infrastructure over inclusive pedagogical approaches, despite its stated goal of improving educational access and quality (Sharma and Singh, 2014). Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) 2009: Enforcing free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 with a focus on non-discrimination, the RTE Act 2009 was a historic policy (RTE Act, 2009). It is observed that the RTE Act greatly increased access to education, it did not sufficiently address inclusivity in the classroom and placed more emphasis on enrolling than on fostering an inclusive learning environment (Sharma and Singh 2011). Next, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) 2001 was one of the government’s efforts. When SSA was first introduced in 2001, its goals were to improve enrolment and the quality of education, especially in underserved and rural areas (Government of India, 2001). While SSA was successful in increasing access to education, it is pointed out that because the program did not adequately address the needs of various student populations, its influence on inclusivity was limited (Kaur and Sharma, 2015). After that The Indian Government created the IEDSS initiative with the aim of integrating disabled students into mainstream schools by offering them resources and support. Despite its goals, it is revealed that the program’s ability to promote inclusive education was hampered by issues such a lack of trained staff and insufficient funds (Rao and Kiran’s 2016). Then National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005: was created in order to make education more inclusive and child-cantered, the NCF 2005 offered guidelines for curriculum development (NCF, 2005). But even while it encouraged a curriculum that was more adaptable and responsive, it fell short of addressing the structural adjustments required to establish inclusive schools (Jha & Mehta, 2021).

Transition to NEP 2020:

The way that the Indian education system addresses inclusion has changed dramatically with the release of this landmark policy. It introduces several key reforms aimed at fostering a more equitable educational environment, building on lessons learned from earlier policies. The policy prioritises creating a flexible curriculum that takes into account India’s many cultural settings, encouraging multilingualism, and integrating students with disabilities into mainstream education (Ministry of Education, 2020). NEP 2020 closes policy gaps from the past by emphasising inclusive education methods, teacher preparation, and resource allocation (Jha & Mehta, 2021). In order to improve inclusion across schools, the policy’s approach includes opportunities for school complexes to share resources and best practices (Rai, 2022). In order to meet the needs of various learners and advance fairness in educational outcomes, NEP 2020 also supports a more child-centred approach to education (Kumar & Sinha, 2023).

Objectives:

1. To explore the various strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom to foster a culture of inclusivity, as outlined in the NEP 2020.
2. To explore the challenges that teachers may face while implementing these strategies.
3. To investigate the equipment and materials needed by educators to foster an inclusive learning environment.

Strategies for teacher to foster a culture of inclusivity: Outline in the NEP (2020):

Teaching practices should aim to support the diverse learning needs of every student, regardless of learning difficulties. Following the guidelines in the NEP (2020), educators can implement the following techniques to foster an inclusive learning environment in the classroom:

1. **Curriculum Adaptation and Differentiation:** A flexible and adaptive curriculum is essential for catering to the different requirements of children, as stressed by NEP 2020. Differentiated instruction, which entails adapting instructional methods and resources to suit a range of learner' styles and aptitudes, is recommended for use by educators (NEP 2020, p. 24). This method guarantees that every student, regardless of learning style or disability, can access the curriculum in a manner that best meets their requirements.
2. **Inclusive Pedagogy:** NEP 2020's inclusive pedagogy is a fundamental element. Teaching strategies that assist all students' including those from underprivileged backgrounds are supported by the policy. Teachers' ought to implement strategies like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which offers several channels for involvement, representation, and action, and cooperative learning, which places students in varied groups (NEP 2020). This fosters a more inclusive learning environment in the classroom and assists in meeting the diverse requirements of students.
3. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** To support inclusive education, NEP 2020 highlights the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers. Training programmes should focus on equipping educators with the skills to recognise and address biases, apply inclusive teaching methods, and maintain an equitable learning environment. This can include workshops on inclusive practices and seminars on cultural competence.
4. **Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment:** The policy emphasizes the need of creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment in the classroom for all students (NEP 2020). Instructors ought to set up guidelines that encourage tolerance for differences and take proactive measures to stop bullying and discrimination. This can be accomplished by establishing explicit rules for polite behaviour and encouraging an environment of empathy and understanding in the classroom.
5. **Parental and Community Involvement:** Involving parents and the community in the educational process is important, according to the NEP 2020. In order to support a more inclusive school culture, teachers should engage with the community and parents to

understand the special needs of each child. This can entail creating networks of support and planning activities that honour diversity.

6. **Use of Technology and Assistive Tools:** Using technology to promote inclusive education is recommended by the NEP 2020 (NEP 2020). Teachers can help kids with special needs by incorporating digital tools and assistive technologies. For instance, text-to-speech software can help students who struggle with reading, and interactive digital platforms can provide students with several ways to connect with the material.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** NEP 2020 stresses the need for regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of inclusive policies. Teachers should assess the impact of their inclusive practices and adjust them based on feedback from students and colleagues. This ongoing process helps improve both teaching strategies and the classroom environment. By applying these approaches, educators can create a more diverse and equitable learning space in line with the policy's goals.

Challenges for Teacher in Implementing Inclusive Classroom Strategies:

The 2020 National Education Policy aims to create an inclusive educational system in which all children, regardless of aptitude, gender, socioeconomic background, or religion, may get a high-quality education. Nonetheless, instructors may face a number of difficulties when putting inclusive classroom climate methods into practice. From the standpoint of NEP 2020, instructors may encounter the following difficulties when putting inclusive classroom climate techniques into practice:

1. **Limited Resources and Support:** The absence of sufficient funding and support for inclusive education is a major issue. Insufficient access to specialised instructional materials, assistive technologies, and support personnel might pose challenges for teachers (Florian, 2014). Their capacity to apply inclusive techniques and address the various needs of every student may be hampered by this scarcity.
2. **Insufficient Professional Development:** The absence of thorough professional development courses with an inclusive education focus is another issue. Teachers could not get enough training on managing diverse classes or implementing inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers may feel unprepared to meet the requirements of pupils from marginalised backgrounds or with impairments as a result of this training gap.
3. **Classroom Management Issues:** In an inclusive classroom with a diverse variety of skills and needs, effective classroom management becomes more difficult. Teachers may find it difficult to provide a supportive learning environment for all students while juggling the academic needs of students with varying abilities (Rose & Meyer, 2002). The wide diversity of behavioural problems and learning requirements found in inclusive classrooms might make this difficulty more difficult to overcome.
4. **Increased Workload:** Using inclusive tactics can result in a much heavier workload for instructors. Teacher burnout may result from the time-consuming and difficult nature of creating individualised lesson plans, assessments, and interventions (Kozleski & Huber, 2010). It could be difficult for teachers to juggle these new obligations with their current ones.

5. **Resistance to Change:** Another potential obstacle is opposition to inclusive education strategies. It's possible that some educators have prejudices or preconceived beliefs about how well inclusive education works, which may limit their openness to trying out novel approaches (Forlin, 2010). Although it can be difficult, changing these attitudes and cultivating an optimistic outlook on inclusive behaviours are essential.
6. **Limited Parental and Administrative Support:** Collaboration is necessary for teachers, parents, and school officials to achieve effective inclusion. On the other hand, a lack of family involvement or administrative support could present difficulties for teachers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990). It can be challenging to successfully execute inclusive methods without the backing of a network.
7. **Diverse Student Needs:** Collaboration is necessary for teachers, parents, and school officials to achieve effective inclusion. On the other hand, a lack of family involvement or administrative support could present difficulties for teachers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990). It can be challenging to successfully execute inclusive methods without the backing of a network.

Although inclusive education is a vital objective, instructors have many difficulties in putting it into practice, such as a lack of resources, insufficient professional development, difficult classroom management, an increase in workload, reluctance to change, and a variety of student requirements. A multidimensional strategy including improved support networks, continual professional development, and cooperative efforts from all parties involved in the educational process is needed to address these issues.

Tool and Resources for inclusive Classroom Culture:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises the importance of developing a high-quality, inclusive, and egalitarian educational system. Teachers must have the necessary tools and resources to foster an inclusive classroom environment. According to NEP 2020, teachers require the following tools and resources to foster an inclusive classroom culture:

1. **Assistive Technology:** Assistive technology is essential for helping pupils with disabilities and learning challenges. Recent research suggests that technologies like speech-to-text software, screen readers, and electronic graphic organisers are critical for providing an accessible learning environment (Cavanaugh & Blomberg, 2019). These tools enable students with a variety of challenges, including visual impairments, dyslexia, and physical disabilities, to participate with the curriculum more effectively.
2. **Differentiated Instruction Resources:** Differentiated instruction involves modifying teaching methods and materials to address the diverse needs of students. Research suggests that using a range of resources, such as levelled texts, visual aids, and interactive digital content, supports this approach (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2019). These tools help teachers accommodate different learning styles and ability levels within the same classroom.
3. **Professional Development:** To keep up with inclusive education approaches, instructors must engage in ongoing professional development. Recent research shows that tailored professional development programs focussing on inclusive teaching practices, cultural competency, and classroom management are helpful in improving teachers' skills (Levin

& Nolan, 2021). These programs help teachers better understand and execute inclusive practices.

4. **Culturally Responsive Curriculum:** An inclusive curriculum represents varied perspectives and caters to a variety of learning requirements. Recent research emphasises the relevance of including culturally responsive materials and practices in the curriculum (Gay, 2018). This includes employing texts and resources that reflect a variety of cultural origins and experiences, allowing all children to feel seen and appreciated.
5. **Classroom Management Tools:** Effective classroom management techniques are required to ensure an inclusive learning environment. According to recent research, technologies such as positive behaviour interventions and supports (PBIS), visual timetables, and behaviour management systems contribute to an organised and supportive classroom environment (Simonsen et al., 2019). These tools are especially effective for addressing various behavioural demands and creating a happy learning environment.
6. **Collaboration Tools:** Collaboration tools facilitate group work and peer interactions, which are crucial for an inclusive classroom. Recent studies emphasize the use of collaborative software, online discussion platforms, and peer tutoring systems to support cooperative learning and communication among students (Boud et al., 2020). These tools help students work together and support each other's learning.
7. **Inclusive Classroom Design:** A well-designed classroom environment supports inclusivity by being accessible and adaptable to various needs. Recent research indicates that classrooms should be arranged to facilitate easy movement, include adaptive furniture, and provide clear visual supports (Kozleski et al., 2021). This design helps ensure that all students, including those with physical disabilities or sensory needs, can navigate and engage with the learning environment effectively.

To summarise, creating an inclusive classroom culture involves leveraging a range of tools and resources, including assistive technology, differentiated instruction materials, professional development programs, culturally responsive curriculum, classroom management tools, collaboration tools, and inclusive classroom design. These resources help teachers address diverse learning needs and foster an equitable and supportive learning environment.

Conclusion:

This paper underscores the critical importance of fostering an inclusive classroom culture as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. By exploring various strategies and approaches and, the study demonstrates how adopting a student-centered approach, utilizing diverse teaching methods, and promoting positive interactions among students can significantly enhance both their academic and social development. The NEP 2020 framework provides a robust foundation for creating an inclusive environment that values mutual respect and understanding. The paper also addresses the challenges teachers face, such as insufficient resources, limited training, and lack of administrative support. These obstacles can impede the effective implementation of inclusive practices. However, the study offers practical solutions to overcome these challenges, emphasizing the need for adequate tools, professional

development, and institutional backing. Ultimately, equipping teachers with the necessary resources and strategies is crucial for building an inclusive classroom that supports every student's growth, regardless of their background or abilities. By addressing both the opportunities and challenges presented by NEP 2020, this paper aims to empower educators to foster a classroom environment where all students can thrive.

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