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## The educational policies of exceptional children at 21st century

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### Abstract

This paper examines the evolution and impact of policies and programs aimed at the education of exceptional children in India, with a focus on inclusive education. Beginning with early initiatives such as the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) Scheme (1974) and the National Policy on Education (1986), the study traces the development of legislative and institutional frameworks including the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), the National Trust Act (1999), and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). It highlights major government programs such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, which promote universal access to education and equitable learning opportunities. The analysis further explores the transformative role of the National Education Policy (2020) in strengthening inclusive practices and ensuring holistic development for children with disabilities. These policies collectively aim to remove barriers, provide necessary support services, and integrate children with special needs into mainstream education. The study concludes that India's policy framework reflects a strong commitment to equity, accessibility, and social inclusion, fostering an educational environment where all children can participate fully and reach their potential.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Exceptional Children, Educational Policies in India, National Education Policy 2020, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC), Rehabilitation Council of India, Educational Equity, Special Education, Accessibility in Education

### Introduction

The policies and programs in the education of exceptional children in India aim to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream education. These initiatives include the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act of 1995, which provides equal opportunities and full participation for individuals with disabilities. The Integrated Education of Disabled Children Act mandates that disabled children receive integrated education. The National Trust Act was enacted in 1999 to support the rights of individuals with disabilities. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an excellent start for universal elementary education, and the New Education Policy 2020 aims to make education universal from preschool through secondary school. These policies and programs are designed to ensure that all children, regardless of their disabilities, have access to quality education and opportunities for full participation in society.

The policies of exceptional children in the 21st century focus on creating an inclusive education system that ensures every child, regardless of their background, has access to quality education. Key policies include:

**National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** Aims to revitalize India's education system, focusing on inclusive and holistic development of children.

**Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009:** Ensures universal access to quality education for all children, promoting inclusive education.

Integrated Education for Disabled Children's scheme: Introduced in 1974, aimed at making education more accessible for students with disabilities.

**Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan:** Aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all children.

These policies reflect a commitment to addressing the unique needs of children with special needs and promoting an environment where all students can learn together. They are part of a broader effort to ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

National policies in India focus on making education more equitable and transparent to every individual, irrespective of any challenges or hindrances. These policies make sure that education is accessible to students with disabilities or the disadvantaged group.

The government has introduced various schemes and policies in order to promote inclusive education, where every student can learn in a collaborative learning environment.

The first educational policy in India for disabled children was introduced in 1974, known as the Integrated Education for Disabled Children's scheme; earlier, it was known as the Integrated Education for Handicapped Children (IEDC) Program.

Earlier Kothari Commission (1966) also focused on promoting integrated education for disabled children. However, it was very limited and didn't see much success.

The main aim of these policies was to make education more accessible by providing financial support to students with disabilities. This includes providing them with transportation, uniforms, special equipment and so on.

Later on, various educational reforms were made, which also include various schemes and policies, which emphasise Integrated education and making inclusive classrooms for every student irrespective of any physical challenges.

The new National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 is the current education policy that focuses on students with disabilities and making education more impactful.

The Programme of Action (POA) refers to various initiatives and frameworks adopted by the United Nations to address specific issues, such as:

**UN POA on Small Arms and Light Weapons:** This initiative aims to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons globally. It includes measures to enhance tracking and reporting mechanisms to track the flow of weapons effectively.

**National POA on Education:** This policy, adopted in 1992, aimed to implement the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986, focusing on promoting education for all, including women and minorities, and strengthening primary, secondary, and higher education.

These programs reflect the UN's commitment to addressing critical global challenges through coordinated efforts and policy frameworks.

## 12 Key National Policies for Inclusive Education in India

Various policies were introduced by the government of India in order to provide support and quality education to students with disabilities. The first policy introduced was the Integrated Education for Handicapped Children (IEDC) Program in 1974; later on, various reforms, policies and schemes were introduced for children with disabilities.

The main aim of policies is to make education more convenient and accessible for students who are physically

challenged or from disadvantaged groups.

An inclusive learning environment ensures that every child's can still be together and share their thoughts, ideas and communicate with each other, which develops a sense of belongingness among them. This also fosters peer-to-peer learning and enhances communication skills among students.

### Integrated Education for Disabled Children Scheme (1974)

It is a prominent scheme introduced by the government of India to provide education to children with disabilities. Earlier, the scheme was known as Integrated Education for Handicapped Children (IEDC).

Later on, the IEDC program was updated in 1992 to allow children with physical and mental disabilities to be educated in the regular school system.

In essence, this project reflects the government's dedication to helping disabled children grow into the most integrated members of the entire educational system.

Under this scheme, students were provided assistance regarding their education, such as the cost of books, incentives, uniform fees, transportation, allowance, etc.

### National Policy on Education (1986)

The National Policy on Education (1986) was another government scheme introduced to change the education system. The main aim of NPE 1986 is to remove the disparities and inequalities in education and make education more accessible.

The NPE 1986 focuses on making an inclusive learning environment that ensures that every child should receive equal education in a structured environment, irrespective of any challenges or barriers.

One of the policy's main tenets was the inclusion of individuals with mental and physical disabilities as equal partners in society.

This policy focuses on providing facilities and assistance to students with disabilities including physical devices, resources, educational supplies and other services.

### Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (1987)

This Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) is a successful government scheme introduced in the year 1987 by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) in compliance with UNICEF.

The scheme ensures that every student receives equal and transparent education irrespective of any physical challenges. This policy emphasises integrating education into mainstream education and promotes collective approach.

This policy is responsible for the educational needs of students and makes sure that every student receives educational material free of cost.

This policy was launched in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu by the end of 1987. By the end of 1988, it was extended to the states of Haryana and Mizoram.

### Baharul Islam Committee (1987)

The Baharul Islam Committee was introduced in the year 1987 through a draft legislation. The committee focuses on

providing equal rights and opportunities to students with disabilities.

This committee encourages children with disabilities to participate in the teaching and learning parameter and acquire mainstream education without any hindrances.

The committee aimed to promote inclusive education and ensure that all children, regardless of their physical or mental abilities, have the opportunity to learn in a supportive environment.

The committee also focuses on creating accessible learning, training teachers, promoting inclusive teaching methods and designing curriculum that caters to the needs of diverse learners.

### **Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992)**

It is a government body established as a registered society in the year 1986, later on it became a statutory body under the RTI Act 1992.

RCI focuses on making education inclusive and providing opportunities to students with physical challenges. The primary objective of RCI is to regulate and standardise training programs and services related to rehabilitation for disabled individuals or students.

RCI makes educational equitable and more effective for people who have disabilities or need personal assistance. RCI makes sure that every student receives quality education irrespective of any challenges through providing proper support and services to students and working professionals.

### **National Trust Act (1999)**

The National Trust Act is an Indian legal law that aims to provide constitutional rights to individuals with disabilities.

National Trust Act is a statutory body launched in the year 1999 which is also known as the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act.

This Act promotes inclusive education by ensuring that students with disabilities can receive an education in regular schools. Apart from defining several terms related to disabilities, the Act mandates the provision of fundamental support services such as healthcare, education and vocational training.

This act also focuses on the establishment of special schools and providing them with vocational education. This enhances employment opportunities as well as helps in promoting lifelong learning.

### **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018)**

It is also known as National Education Mission launched in the year 2018. This scheme focuses on providing equitable and universal access to education to children with disabilities, irrespective of any biases.

To ensure a seamless transition from pre-nursery to Class 12, it places a strong emphasis on providing a comprehensive education.

One of its primary objectives is to attain equitable learning outcomes in order to reduce the disparities in educational access and quality. This focuses on promoting holistic education and creates a positive learning environment for every child.

### **National Policy for People with Disabilities (2006)**

The National Policy for People with Disabilities was launched in 2006, which aims to provide equal and flexible education to students with disabilities.

The main aim of this policy is to create an environment that allows individuals with disabilities to live lives of independence and dignity in order to guarantee equal opportunities in all spheres of life and to encourage full participation in society.

Under this scheme, children with mental and physical challenges were provided educational opportunities, as well as providing them with assistance and support. This policy emphasises providing free education, transportation, allowance, resources, books, etc., were given to physically challenged children.

### **Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE)**

The Right to Education Act 2009 is a legal Act introduced in the year 2009 that emphasises providing free and compulsory education to students between the age group of 6 to 14. (2)

This Act focuses on inclusive education and provides them with the necessary support and resources. This Act also sets up special education schools and supports children with special needs.

RTE focuses on special education and integrating them into mainstream schools. RTE breaks the barriers of discrimination and provides children with equal and transparent education.

Through RTE, enrolment of children with special needs has increased to elementary education. According to the RTE Act, children with disabilities should be educated in regular schools with other students, which develops a sense of belongingness and cooperation.

### **Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD)**

It is a major intervention of the government and a part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This scheme was first introduced in 1974 and went through various revisions till 2010.

The main aim of IECYD is to provide all students with disabilities with the opportunity to learn in a general education classroom with the necessary support and accommodations.

IECHYD promotes inclusive education, which enhances academic outcomes for students with disabilities. This program makes sure that every school should adopt integration programs and normalises an inclusive learning environment in the classroom.

IECHYD helps in increasing student enrolment and reducing dropouts among disabled children, especially in rural areas.

### **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016**

This is a major intervention of the government and a part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This scheme was first introduced in 1974 and went through various revisions till 2010.

The main aim of IECYD is to provide all students with disabilities with the opportunity to learn in a general education classroom with the necessary support and accommodations. (3)

IECHYD promotes inclusive education, which enhances academic outcomes for students with disabilities. This program makes sure that every school should adopt integration programs and normalises an inclusive learning environment in the classroom.

IECHYD helps in increasing student enrolment and reducing dropouts among disabled children, especially in rural areas.

### **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016**

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act is a popular Act for disabled persons that provides them with legal protection and opportunities.

Under this Act, 21 types of disabilities are recognised as visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disorders, mental disorders and so on. The Act contains provisions to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination and abuse.

Any form of discrimination against individuals with disabilities is prohibited under this Act. This Act also sets out special education and rehabilitation services across educational institutions. (5)

This act also makes sure that every student receives equal learning opportunities, as well as every school should create an inclusive learning environment.

### **National Education Policy 2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 or the new National Education Policy, is the latest educational policy introduced in the year 2020, replacing old educational policies. This policy makes education more equitable and systematic.

This policy is replacing the old 10+2 system with the 5+3+2+2 system. By establishing an inclusive and equitable educational system that recognises the diversity of student needs, this policy aims to guarantee that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a supportive learning environment.

The policy recognises the value of inclusive education in fostering a sense of belonging and community among all students. In order for children with disabilities to learn alongside their peers, it encourages their integration into regular classrooms.

### **The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992**

It establishes the Rehabilitation Council of India to regulate and monitor the training of rehabilitation professionals, maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register, and promote research in rehabilitation and special education.

The Act was enacted to constitute the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) with the primary objectives of regulating the training of rehabilitation professionals, maintaining a Central Rehabilitation Register, and promoting research in rehabilitation and special education. It ensures that professionals working in the field of disability and rehabilitation meet standardized qualifications and training requirements (The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992).

The Act is officially called the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 and comes into force on a date notified by the Central Government.

Terms used in the Act are defined within it, and references to other laws, such as the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation)

Act, 1995, are incorporated where applicable.

The RCI is constituted by the Central Government and includes members representing the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, experts in rehabilitation, and other nominated members. The Council forms an Executive Committee and other committees as necessary to carry out its functions.

### **Functions of the Council**

Regulate and monitor training programs for rehabilitation professionals.

Recognize qualifications granted by universities or institutions in India for rehabilitation professionals.

Maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of qualified professionals.

Promote research and development in rehabilitation and special education.

**Powers and Responsibilities:** The Council can prescribe standards for training, inspect institutions, and take disciplinary action against unqualified or unethical practitioners. It also determines the conditions of service for its officers and employees

### **Conclusion**

The policies for exceptional children in the 21st century emphasize the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the educational system. These policies aim to provide equitable access to education for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, are key documents that guide these policies. They advocate for the inclusion of underrepresented student groups, including children with disabilities, and recommend a whole school approach to inclusion. This approach involves resourcing school complexes, engaging special educators, and providing capacity-building for teachers and special educators. The policies also focus on the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools, ensuring that they receive appropriate education and related services.

Since 1974, India has implemented a number of national policies and initiatives that demonstrate a strong commitment to advancing inclusive education for kids and young people with disabilities.

The National Education Policy 2020 and the Integrated Education for Disabled Children Scheme both seek to establish accessible and equitable learning environments that meet the various needs of all students.

In order to guarantee that every child, irrespective of their skills or difficulties, has the chance to flourish in a cooperative learning environment, the government places a strong emphasis on integration support services and the removal of obstacles to education.

Continuous efforts to improve inclusive education help create a more inclusive society by encouraging social integration and a sense of belonging among all students, in addition to academic success.

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