

Exploring The Role Of Special Educators And The Implementation Challenges Of Inclusive Education Under Nep 2020

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Abstract

India's educational landscape has seen a significant shift with the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places a strong emphasis on inclusivity and equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs. This study looks at the practical challenges special educators encounter when implementing NEP 2020 recommendations at the school level, as well as the significance of special educators in fostering an inclusive learning environment. Special educators are essential in bridging the gap between curriculum delivery and the diverse learning demands of children with disabilities and learning problems. Systemic problems include inadequate administrative assistance, a lack of infrastructure, a lack of training, and ignorance of the policy's terms usually limit their effectiveness.

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in this descriptive study. Information was gathered from 40 special educators and administrators in regular schools that implemented inclusive practices using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were used to examine trends related to the challenges, support systems, and preparedness of special educators. The findings indicate that while most educators concur that NEP 2020 has progressive objectives, its actual execution is hampered by a lack of capacity building, a lack of policy knowledge, and resistance to structural change in schools.

The paper concludes with practical recommendations for enhancing inclusive education, including improved training for teachers, collaborative policymaking, and the establishment of support networks at the institutional and community levels. The information acquired from this study highlights the significance of empowering special educators in line with national reforms and contributes to the growing discussion on inclusive education in India.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Special Educators; NEP 2020; Educational Policy Implementation; Challenges in Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

According to inclusive education, which is founded on the concepts of equality and social justice, every student should receive a top-notch education, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, or social problems. The approach encourages integrating diverse students into ordinary classrooms rather than dividing them based on their abilities or limits. Since the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced, the concept has gained increasing attention in India and abroad. It emphasizes inclusive and equitable education as a key component of the country's future educational framework. (Bhat and Geelani, 2018)

NEP 2020 promotes a learner-centric approach and specifically asks for the inclusion of children with special needs (CWSN) into normal schools. It recognizes that in order to ensure that every kid participates meaningfully, inclusive curriculum design, flexible teaching methods, highly skilled teachers, and infrastructure modifications are required. Special education teachers have a significant role in this scenario. They not only offer students with disabilities direct instructional support, but they also act as partners, advocates, and facilitators in the creation of inclusive learning environments. However, these educators' preparedness, awareness, and skill are essential to implementing inclusive education in accordance with NEP 2020. Problems have not been resolved by changes in policy. Many schools still lack specialized special educators and inclusive infrastructure. High student-teacher ratios, a lack of administrative support, insufficient training, and opposition to inclusive practices are commonly mentioned by educators as significant barriers. The stakeholders' varying levels of awareness and understanding of NEP 2020 also affect the implementation's speed and quality.

The study's goals are to investigate the actual function of special educators in ordinary classrooms and the main challenges they face while trying to align their work with NEP 2020 goals. This study will look at

the viewpoints and experiences of educators and administrators in order to get a better understanding of the actual situation with regard to inclusive education in India. It also seeks to identify the gaps between policy and practice and provide practical ways to enhance inclusion in learning environments. The findings of the study are expected to give legislators, school officials, and teacher training programs committed to building a more equitable and inclusive educational system useful information. (Florian and Black, 2011)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing for the diverse requirements of every student within a common educational framework is the aim of the global movement known as inclusive education. According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive education aims to transform educational establishments so that all students, including those with impairments, can be accommodated without discrimination. According to research, students with special needs perform significantly better socially and academically when there are certified special educators on staff. These educators collaborate with general educators, provide specialized support, and help modify the curriculum and pedagogy to make learning accessible. (Sharma & Das, 2015)

The foundation for inclusive education in India has been laid by the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). However, the implementation has been uneven due to systemic issues such as a shortage of qualified staff, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of educated teachers (Singal, 2019). NEP 2020 provides a new perspective on inclusivity by supporting the use of assistive technology to improve learning and the hiring of special educators in all school complexes. According to research by Nanda (2021) and Bhatia (2022), many educators are still ignorant of or unprepared to apply inclusive practices that are in line with NEP 2020. Despite the policy's progressive intent, there is a discrepancy between its conception and local implementation. The literature suggests that awareness campaigns, capacity building, and institutional support mechanisms are crucial for effectively achieving the goals of inclusive education. Therefore, a body of work that illustrates both the potential and the practical challenges of special education supports the role of special educators in creating inclusive environments within the NEP 2020 framework. (Halder, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

• Data Collection

The data collection process was meticulously structured to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the role of special educators and the challenges of implementing inclusive education in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, to increase the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings. (Kalita, 2020)

The primary data came from mainstream schools that have adopted inclusive education approaches in accordance with NEP 2020 requirements. The intended responders included school administrators and special educators who were actively involved in inclusive education programs. To provide a wider reach and flexibility, a combination of offline distribution (printed questionnaires) and online platforms (Google Forms or emailed surveys) was used, taking into consideration respondents' availability and institutional constraints. To guarantee its validity, a small group of educators pre-tested the questionnaire, and it was modified based on their suggestions. The final questionnaire had both closed-ended items (such as statements on a Likert scale) and open-ended questions to capture complicated perspectives and lived experiences.

In addition to the survey, a subset of participants who consented to discuss their challenges and experiences in greater detail were invited to take part in optional semi-structured interviews. The qualitative insights gained from these interviews provided a deeper understanding of the difficulties in implementing inclusive education and helped contextualize the quantitative data. Each participant gave their informed consent before to participation, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Ethical considerations, such as voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any moment, were strictly adhered to during the data collection process. (Kumar and Taneja, 2023)

• Type of Study

The present study adopts a descriptive research design employing a mixed-method approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Descriptive research

is appropriate for this investigation as it aims to systematically describe the existing conditions, roles, and challenges faced by special educators in the context of inclusive education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. (Nigam, 2020)

A systematic questionnaire is used in the quantitative component to gather quantifiable information about educators' readiness, institutional support, and policy-guideline awareness. This makes it possible to spot trends, patterns, and connections between important factors like years of experience, training level, and self-assurance in using inclusive policies.

Through the use of optional semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey questions, the qualitative component adds depth to the quantitative findings. These answers offer a contextual knowledge of beliefs, institutional constraints, and human experiences pertaining to the difficulties in putting inclusive education into practice. (NSO, 2021)

- **Sampling method**

Participants who are directly active in implementing inclusive education practices within the NEP 2020 framework were chosen for the study using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling procedures. (Rasool, 2020)

Purposive sampling was utilized to deliberately choose individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives, including special educators and school administrators working in mainstream schools that have adopted inclusive education approaches. This method ensures that the selected participants have the knowledge, experience, and context necessary to provide meaningful insights into the role and challenges of inclusive education. The sample size, which was believed to be sufficient for capturing both qualitative and quantitative themes in a small-scale descriptive study, ranged from 30 to 50 people. Care was taken to include teachers from government, private, and semi-private school contexts in order to ensure variety in institutional practices and experiences implementing policy. (Sardar *et al.*, 2024)

- **Tool Used for the Study**

The primary tool used for data collection in this study was a **structured questionnaire** developed specifically to align with the objectives of the research. The questionnaire was designed to gather quantitative data from special educators and school administrators regarding their roles, experiences, and challenges in implementing inclusive education practices under the NEP 2020 framework. (Sharma, 2020)

- **Data Collection Tool**

For this study, a structured questionnaire served as the main instrument for gathering data. It was created to collect pertinent data from school administrators and special educators about their responsibilities and the difficulties in putting inclusive education into practice in accordance with NEP 2020. (Shivam, 2025) Three main parts made up the questionnaire: (1) demographic information, including age, gender, education, and years of experience; (2) the role of special educators, emphasizing their planning, collaborative, and instructional duties; and (3) implementation challenges, which included Likert-scale items gauging opinions about infrastructure, policy awareness, training adequacy, and institutional support.

For attitudinal questions, the tool employed a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). A few extra open-ended items were also added to collect more information. Before being distributed in both online and offline versions, the questionnaire underwent a pilot test for clarity and reliability and was examined by subject matter experts for content validity. (Singh and Mishra, 2023)

- **Inclusion Criteria**

- Special educators currently employed in mainstream schools following inclusive education practices.

- School administrators involved in implementing NEP 2020 guidelines.
- Participants with a minimum of 1 year of experience in inclusive education settings.
- Respondents willing to provide informed consent for participation.
- Educators and administrators from both government and private schools.

- **Exclusion Criteria**

- Educators not involved in inclusive education or special needs support.
- Participants employed in non-mainstream or special schools only.
- Individuals with less than 1 year of professional experience in education.

- Respondents who do not consent to participate in the study.
- Incomplete or improperly filled questionnaires.

- **Data Analysis**

The data collected through the structured questionnaire was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to derive meaningful insights aligned with the research objectives.

- **Descriptive Analysis**

The demographic details of the respondents, including factors like age, gender, education, teaching experience, and school type, were compiled using descriptive statistics. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to examine responses to Likert-scale items measuring views of role clarity, policy awareness, training, and obstacles. This aided in determining general response patterns and central tendencies among administrators and special educators. (Suja and Elamaran, 2024)

- **Chi-Square Test**

The Chi-square test of independence was used to investigate relationships between categorical variables. It was utilized, for instance, to investigate the relationship between years of experience and knowledge of NEP 2020 criteria, as well as between the type of institution (private or public) and the availability of inclusive education resources. This made it easier to determine whether or not these factors were substantially connected.

- **Regression Analysis**

Regression analysis was also used to evaluate the independent variables' predictive power on important outcome metrics. To investigate if training, institutional support, and teaching experience could predict the degree of confidence in managing inclusive classrooms, a linear regression model was used. Regression analysis also looked at how administrative support and resource availability affected how well inclusive education strategies were implemented. (Samagra, 2022)

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

- **Demographic Profile of Respondents**

With 40 participants overall, including 15 school administrators (37.5%) and 25 special educators (62.5%), the study purposefully focused on stakeholders actively involved in implementing inclusive education. The fact that women made up a noteworthy 70% of the respondents is consistent with larger patterns in the education sector, where women are more frequently found in support and teaching positions, especially in inclusive education in Figure 1. (Agarwal, 2022)

Sixty percent of the participants came from private schools, with the remaining forty percent coming from government institutions. A fair assessment of inclusive education practices across various school administration styles is given by this distribution. Comparative insights about resource availability, policy knowledge, and administrative support all of which might differ greatly between sectors are made possible by the inclusion of both government and private entities.

This demographic makeup guarantees that the study's conclusions represent a range of institutional contexts and degrees of policy participation, which enhances the understanding of the potential and difficulties in putting NEP 2020's inclusive education directives into practice. (Prabhat, 2021)

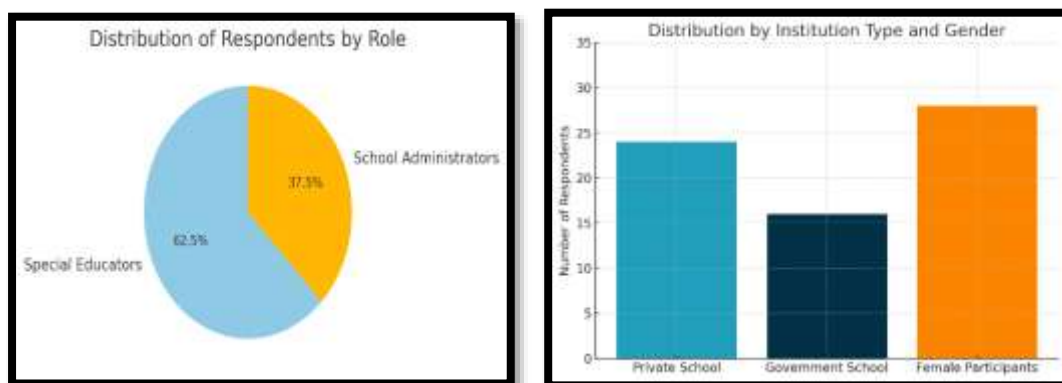


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Awareness of NEP 2020**

According to the analysis, respondents' awareness of the inclusive education provisions in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was moderate. A total of 65% of the 40 participants said they were "aware" (45%) or "highly aware" (20%) of the inclusive education-related NEP 2020 guidelines. In contrast, 35% of respondents said they were neutral, had little awareness, or had no awareness at all, pointing to a serious lack of training and distribution of policies in Figure 2.

On a 5-point Likert scale, the average awareness score was 3.4 ± 1.1 , indicating that there was variation in comprehension, with some teachers exhibiting thorough knowledge and others remaining mainly ignorant. Interestingly, teachers in private schools had somewhat greater awareness than those at public schools.

These results show that although NEP 2020 is acknowledged in theory, educators' practical comprehension of it varies. In order to guarantee successful policy implementation at the local level, this emphasizes the necessity of focused orientation programs and institutional training sessions. (Samagra, 2017)

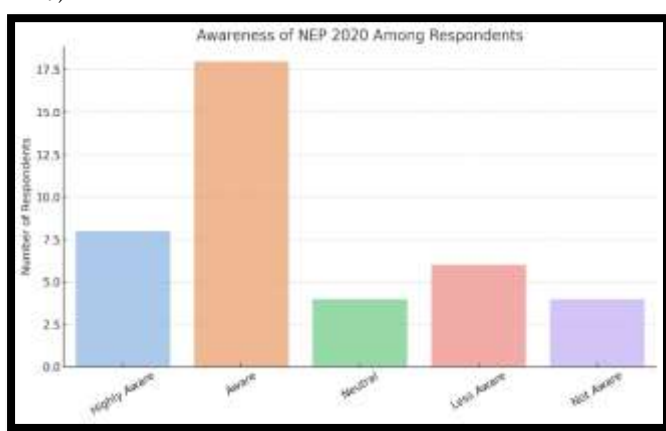


Figure 2: Awareness of NEP 2020 Among Respondents

- **Institutional Support and Challenges**

The survey found that respondents had serious concerns about institutional support for inclusive education. Merely 40% of respondents concurred that their educational institutions offered sufficient facilities, instructional resources, and administrative support to successfully execute inclusive procedures. Lack of training opportunities was cited by a significant majority of responders (72%), who also cited insufficient classroom supplies and a lack of time for collaborative planning with general educators as important challenges.

On a 5-point Likert scale, the mean score for institutional support was 2.9 ± 1.2 , which suggests that people are generally not very satisfied with the support structures that are now in place. Being expected to handle complicated classroom requirements with no pedagogical or logistical support infuriated a number of instructors. Furthermore, some administrators admitted that higher authorities had not provided clear implementation plans for the terms of NEP 2020 in Figure 3.

These results highlight the urgent need for schools and legislators to fund inclusive infrastructure, teacher mentoring, and capacity-building in order to foster an environment that supports the successful work of special educators. (Saeed, 2023)

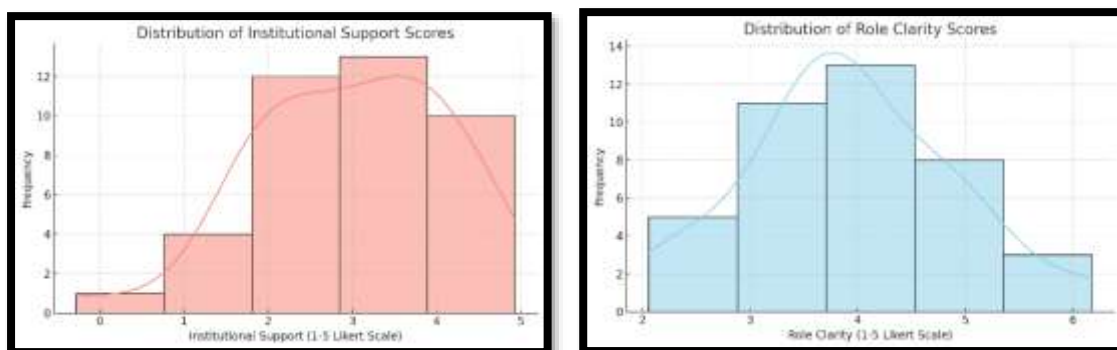


Figure 3: Institutional Support and Challenges

• **Statistical Analysis**

Experience and NEP awareness were shown to be statistically significantly correlated ($\chi^2 = 6.78, p = 0.034$), indicating that respondents with over 10 years of experience were more likely to be aware of NEP 2020 requirements than those with less years of service. This data suggests that experience, whether as a result of extended institutional exposure, participation in training programs, or administrative duties, influences policy awareness in Figure 4. In order to maintain uniform implementation across staff levels, it emphasizes the necessity of making sure that less seasoned educators receive equivalent training and orientation on current policy changes. (Sir, 2022)



Figure 4: Heatmap of Challenges Faced by Role

The two predictors accounted for 51% of the variance in confidence scores, according to the statistically significant model ($R^2 = 0.51, p < 0.01$). The strongest predictor among them was the training obtained ($\beta = 0.61, p = 0.01$), indicating a significant beneficial influence on instructors' confidence. Additionally, there was a moderately positive impact from administrative support ($\beta = 0.39, p = 0.04$).

These results demonstrate the importance of capacity-building programs, including organized instruction and institutional support, in preparing teachers to manage inclusive settings. To empower special educators, educational leaders should place a high priority on professional development and cultivate positive school environments. (Tindal, 2020)

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this study aimed to investigate the role of special educators and the difficulties they encounter when putting inclusive education into practice. The results show that although special educators are essential in helping kids with special needs, modifying curricula, and working with regular instructors, there is still a significant lack of institutional support, training, and policy implementation. The findings showed that educators had a modest level of familiarity with NEP 2020, with more seasoned educators showing a higher level of familiarity. It was discovered that role clarity was uneven, frequently hampered by conflicting duties and a lack of administrative guidance.

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