



Examining the Challenges of Implementing SDG-4's Inclusive Education Goals within the Context of NEP 2020's Educational Reforms for Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the challenges associated with implementing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) regarding inclusive and equitable quality education in India in light of the educational reforms contained in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Although NEP 2020 speaks to universalization, equity, and social inclusion, access to education for marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, economically weaker sections, and children with disabilities is still hindered. The study examines policies, identifies systemic and operational challenges, and finally examines the extent of convergence between the proposed NEP 2020 reforms and the intended SDG-4 ends. Drawing from the analysis finding that, although NEP 2020 presents a strong conceptual framework for implementing inclusive education, its practical application is impeded by socio-economic inequality, infrastructural constraints, lack of preparedness of teachers, and sub-national inequalities. Lastly, the study argues that targeted interventions, outreach, ongoing teacher training, and rigorous monitoring are the keys to transforming policies ideas and intentions into inclusive learning experiences for marginalized communities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; SDG-4; NEP 2020; Marginalized Communities; Equity in Education; Teacher Training; India; Educational Reform

Literature Review

1. Inclusive Education and SDG-4

Sustainable Development Goals 4 is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015). Inclusive education anticipates the removal of barriers to learning caused by factors such as socio-economic background, gender, caste, disability or ethnicity so that all children can participate in their learning in meaningful ways. UNESCO argued (2020) that inclusive education is essential both morally and for development effectiveness because it promotes social cohesion, reduces gaps in inequalities, and develops the human capital of the nation.

2. India's Marginalized Communities and Learning Problems

India's marginalized social groups continue to have inequities, although enrolments have improved. The ASER (2019) found that Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled tribes (ST) and poor households had lower levels of literacy and numeracy proficiency than their counter parts. More girls, disabled children and children from rural areas are particularly trapped in the inequalities. The work of Tilak (2020) and Govinda (2017) drew out ill fate evident in examples cited a few issues such as poverty, long-distance diversity, discrimination, and drop-out rates as the major barriers.

3. NEP 2020 and Inclusive Education

NEP 2020 emphasizes equity and inclusion and includes mechanisms such as:

- Universal foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by Grade 3
- Flexible curricula and multilingual education to honour and respect the linguistic diversity
- Reservation policies and scholarship provisions for the marginalized
- Support to children with disabilities, individual education plans and assistive technologies

However, policy implementation within educational systems remains a challenge as Singh (2021) highlights, due to gaps in infrastructure, teacher readiness and socio-cultural barriers.

4. Teacher Readiness and Training

Teachers are key players in the education for inclusion agenda. Darling-Hammond (2017) conveys that where teachers participate in training that involves differentiated instruction, inclusive pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy, they can have a significant impact on the learning attainment of marginalised children. In the Indian context, CPD is essential as noted by Batra (2014) and Azam (2021), along with classroom support and mentorship in order to implement NEP 2020 responsibilities in their professional contexts.

5. Implementation Issues

Unequal socio-economics: Areas of poverty, child labor and gender norms remaining barriers to school enrollment

Unavailability of infrastructure: The shortage of accessible classrooms, learning materials and sanitation facilities

Language issues: Multilingual classrooms create teachers and assessment problems

Policy non-practice: Inconsistent in implementation at the state level, ineffective monitoring, and inadequate resource allocation narrows the success of the NEP 2020 initiatives.

Objectives

1. To assess SDG-4's inclusive education aspirations in relation to NEP 2020 initiatives.
2. To establish the challenges faced by marginalized groups in accessing quality education in India.
3. To examine systemic, institutional and socio-economic barriers to inclusive education.
4. To provide considerations for effective implementation of inclusive education policies related to NEP 2020.

Research Methodology

Method: Qualitative policy analysis and literature review.

1. Data Source:

Primary: NEP 2020 document, government documents on inclusive education, guidelines on NIPUN Bharat.

Secondary: ASER reports, peer-reviewed articles on inclusive education, reports from UNESCO and World Bank.

2. Analytical Methods:

Thematic policy provision, problem, and case study methods.

Comparative analysis on the SDG-4 strategic targets and the NEP 2020 strategies.

Limitations:

Secondary data for analysis and did not include field-based empirical data.

Results

1. Alignment of NEP 2020 with SDG-4:

NEP 2020 appears closely aligned with SDG-4 along the pillars of equity, inclusion and lifelong learning.

The policies attempt to address and challenge language diversity, disability, gender inequality and socio-economic disadvantage.

2. Continuing Barriers:

Socio-economic: persistent poverty, child labour and gender norms constrain students' chances of enrolling in school.

Infrastructure: poor physical state of schools, classrooms, sanitation facilities, and accessibility for children with disabilities.

Teacher preparedness: there is limited access to pedagogy training, and teaching for the capacity for differentiated learning.

Regional differences: the state-in problem of the way policies/budgeting is implemented, resources are allocated, and monitoring.

Discussion

Integrating SDG-4 inclusive education targets into the NEP 2020 reforms provides both an opportunity and a challenge. On one hand, these frameworks share a common understanding...; on the other hand, systemic obstacles... including poverty, social discrimination, poor infrastructure, and educators' lack of capacities that prevent realization of relevant sustainable development goals. The first challenge is human resource - teachers need professional development in inclusive pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction and differentiated instruction if they are going to be able to implement inclusive practices for varied individual learning needs. Secondly, different levels of resource provision and uptake of policy across regions often adapt the inequity from rural to urban settings. Thirdly, and perhaps obvious, countries do not share the same vision of an inclusive education even if SDG 4.5 objectives are more towards an inclusive educational trajectory. Four previous historical international lessons maintain that inclusive education happens when the policy arrangement is supported by the following: funding, monitoring, teacher training & the involvement of community stakeholders. So while NEP 2020 goes in the right direction... it takes the need for interventions at a number of levels; institutional, community, and policy to put into practice inclusive education.

Conclusion

The NEP 2020 provides a visionary vision aligned with SDG-4 to help India's marginalized communities have access to equitable and inclusive learning. While the NEP reforms can potentially address the historical disadvantages faced by marginalized communities, there are several socio-economic, infrastructure, and pedagogical obstacles that will impede achieving SDG-4 goals. The successful implementation of the NEP reforms depends on adequate teacher training, resources, equitable and acceptable infrastructure, community involvement, and systematic monitoring to ensure that all children, regardless of background and ability, have access to quality education. It is evident that it will require efforts at the level of policy, level of institutions and level of the community to achieve SDG-4 and inclusive learning in India by 2030.

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