



INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP 2020: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS AND FRAMEWORK

Ashiya jawed

M.Ed. Scholar, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad-500032

Email: ashiyajawedssta@gmail.com

Paper Received On: 20 MAR 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 24 APRIL 2026

Published On: 01 MAY 2026

Abstract

Education plays a vital role in shaping individuals and promoting social development and in recent years, the concept of inclusive classroom practices has gained importance, especially at the secondary level, where learners come from diverse backgrounds with varied abilities and needs. National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes inclusive classroom practices through provisions such as flexible curriculum, learner-centered pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and support for diverse learners. However, despite these provisions, a gap exists between the theoretical framework and actual classroom practices. This study is theoretical in nature and is based on a review of relevant literature and policy documents. It aims to analyse inclusive classroom practices at the secondary level and examine the gap between policy recommendations and their implementation. The analysis indicates that although inclusive classroom practices are clearly outlined in policy, their implementation remains uneven due to systemic challenges such as limited teacher preparedness, rigid assessment patterns, and resource constraints so the study suggests that without addressing these issues, inclusion may remain theoretical. Therefore, there is a need for improved teacher training, flexible assessment practices, and better resource support to ensure effective alignment between policy and classroom practice.

KEY TERMS: *Inclusive Education, Inclusive Classroom Practices, Diverse Learners, Children with Special Needs (CWSN), Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Group (SEDGs), New Education Policy-2020 (NEP 2020), Gifted Learners, Secondary Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning is a continuous process that shapes an individual's overall development and participation in society. In recent years, inclusive education has become central to ensuring fairness and equal learning opportunities for all students. In the Indian context, NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on creating classrooms that respond to diverse learning needs through

flexible and student-centered approaches. However, there remains a noticeable difference between what the policy envisions and what is practiced in actual classrooms.

This paper examines inclusive classroom practices in secondary schools in the light of NEP 2020, with particular attention to policy directions and insights drawn from existing literature.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the concept of inclusive education at the secondary school level.
2. To examine the provisions related to inclusive education in National Education Policy 2020.
3. To study inclusive classroom practices in secondary education through existing literature.
4. To identify the gap between policy provisions and actual classroom practices.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education plays a crucial role in building a fair and inclusive society. The idea of inclusive education stresses that every learner, irrespective of background, ability, or social condition, should have equal access to meaningful learning opportunities. It is not limited to enrolment but also includes participation, acceptance, and achievement within the classroom.

In the Indian context, NEP 2020 has brought a renewed focus on inclusion and equity in school education at secondary level. The policy gives special attention to disadvantaged groups and learners with special needs, and encourages the use of flexible teaching methods, learner-centered approaches, and supportive classroom environments, despite these progressive provisions, various studies suggest that actual classroom practices often do not fully reflect the inclusive vision of the policy. Factors such as reliance on traditional teaching methods, limited teacher training, and infrastructural constraints create a gap between policy intentions and classroom reality.

This paper focuses on analysing inclusive classroom practices in secondary schools in the context of NEP 2020 by examining policy provisions, reviewing existing practices through literature, and identifying the gaps between policy expectations and real classroom situations.

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to an approach in which all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or differences, are provided equal opportunities to learn together in the same classroom environment. It emphasizes participation, acceptance, and achievement for every student, including those from disadvantaged groups and those with special needs. “Inclusive education is not a privilege, but a fundamental right of every learner.” — UNESCO

So according to UNESCO, inclusive education is understood as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, while reducing exclusion within and from education systems. It involves changes in content, approaches, structures, and strategies to accommodate all learners.

Inclusive education goes beyond mere access to schooling; it focuses on creating supportive learning environments where differences are respected and valued. It encourages the use of flexible teaching methods, adaptive curriculum, and collaborative learning practices to meet the varied needs of students.

Brief of NEP 2020

The NEP 2020, developed under the chairmanship of K. Kasturirangan, provides a comprehensive framework for transforming the Indian education system. The policy is organized into four major parts with a total of 27 chapters, covering school education, higher education, key focus areas, and implementation strategies. It introduces significant reforms such as the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, and a shift from rote learning to experiential and competency-based learning. The policy strongly promotes equity and inclusion by addressing the needs of socio-economically disadvantaged groups and children with special needs, while also encouraging the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early education. Additionally, it highlights the importance of teacher training, integration of technology, multidisciplinary learning, and assessment reforms. Overall, NEP 2020 is important as it aims to create a more inclusive, flexible, and learner-centered education system that supports holistic development and prepares learners with essential skills for the future and for the higher education.

Secondary Education in India

Secondary education in India plays an important role in preparing students for higher education and future opportunities. At this stage, classrooms include learners with varied abilities and backgrounds, along with increased academic demands. In such a setting, the need for inclusive classroom practices becomes important to ensure effective participation and learning for all students.

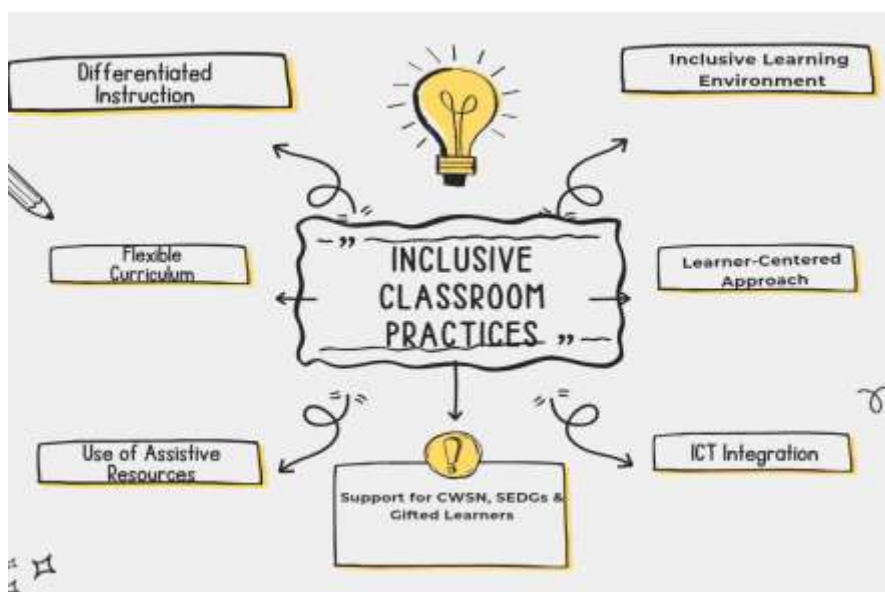
NEP 2020 and Inclusive Classroom Practices at Secondary Level.

The NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on inclusive and equitable education, particularly highlighted in Part I (School Education) and Part III (Other Key Areas of Focus). In Part I, the policy focuses on universal access, participation, and learning for all students through flexible curriculum and learner-centered approaches. A detailed emphasis is given in Chapter 6:

“Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All,” which promotes education for all categories of learners, including Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), Children with Special Needs (CWSN), gifted learners, and other diverse learners, ensuring that no child is excluded from meaningful learning opportunities.

In terms of inclusive classroom practices NEP 2020 advocates experiential and activity-based learning, multilevel teaching strategies, and flexible pedagogy to address diverse learning needs. It encourages teachers to develop supportive and inclusive learning environments at secondary school level where every learner can participate according to their abilities. The policy also highlights the importance of teacher preparation, mother tongue-based instruction, assistive technologies, and digital integration to strengthen inclusive education practices. For CWSN, it suggests assistive devices, accessible learning environments, and individualized support. For disadvantaged learners, it focuses on equal access, financial assistance, and retention support. For gifted learners, the policy encourages enrichment activities, advanced learning opportunities, creativity-based tasks, and flexible curriculum options to develop their potential and prepare for higher Education.

Overall, the policy envisions classrooms that are inclusive, flexible, and learner-centered, catering to the needs of all learners including gifted, disadvantaged, and differently-abled students. However, despite these progressive provisions, existing literature indicates a gap between policy intentions and actual classroom practices. This gap highlights the need for a critical analysis of inclusive education in practice at secondary level Education, which forms the focus of the present study.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive education promotes equal participation and learning opportunities for all students. Research shows it improves interaction and inclusion but is often limited by lack of training, resources, and difficulty in meeting diverse learner needs.

Research related to NEP 2020 highlights its strong emphasis on equity, inclusion, and learner-centered education. The policy promotes flexible curriculum, experiential learning, and support for diverse learners including CWSN, SEDGs, and gifted students. NCERT (2021–2023) reviews suggest that NEP 2020 provides a strong conceptual framework for inclusive education; however, its implementation in schools is still uneven due to practical and institutional constraints.

At the secondary education level, Sharma and Singh (2022) found that teachers are generally supportive of inclusive practices but struggle to implement differentiated instruction due to limited training and high academic pressure. Kumar (2021) reported that secondary school classrooms often remain exam-oriented, which reduces opportunities for inclusive and activity-based learning. Reddy (2022) observed that in secondary schools, traditional lecture methods still dominate, limiting participation of diverse learners.

Singh (2023) highlighted that inclusive practices in secondary classrooms are more effective when teachers use flexible grouping and activity-based learning strategies. Agarwal (2021) noted that gifted learners in secondary education often do not receive adequate enrichment, leading to underutilization of their potential. Verma (2022) further found that secondary schools with strong leadership and teacher support systems show better implementation of inclusive strategies.

Mehta (2023) reported that technology integration in secondary education can improve accessibility for learners with disabilities, but its use remains inconsistent. NCERT (2022) also pointed out that despite increased awareness after NEP 2020, secondary schools face challenges such as large class sizes, curriculum pressure, and limited training, which slow down inclusive transformation.

Although several studies have explored inclusive education and NEP 2020 separately, limited research has critically examined how NEP 2020 is reflected in actual inclusive classroom practices specifically at the secondary education level. This highlights the need for a focused theoretical analysis linking policy intentions with classroom realities in secondary schools.

DISCUSSION

National Education Policy 2020 provides a progressive framework for inclusive education by promoting flexibility, equity, and learner-centered practices for all categories of learners, including CWSN, SEDGs, and gifted students. It envisions classrooms where teaching is differentiated, experiential, and responsive to diverse learning needs. However, a critical analysis of existing classroom practices reveals a significant gap between these policy ideals and ground realities.

Although NEP 2020 advocates activity-based and experiential learning, secondary classrooms in practice often remain dominated by textbook-centered and examination-oriented teaching. This indicates that policy reform has not yet fully translated into pedagogical change. One major reason is the persistence of traditional teaching beliefs and exam-driven school culture, which restricts innovation in classroom practices. Similarly, while NEP 2020 emphasizes differentiated instruction for diverse learners, its implementation is limited by practical constraints such as high student–teacher ratios, insufficient teacher training, and workload pressure. As a result, teachers often find it difficult to address individual learning differences effectively, making inclusion more theoretical than functional.

In the case of CWSN, SEDGs, and gifted learners, NEP 2020 proposes targeted support and enrichment. However, in reality, inclusive support systems remain uneven. Many schools lack assistive resources for CWSN, while gifted learners rarely receive structured enrichment opportunities, leading to both under-support and under-challenge within the same classroom. Furthermore, although NEP 2020 encourages technology integration to support inclusive learning, digital infrastructure disparities and limited teacher competence in using technology reduce its effectiveness, particularly in government and rural schools.

Overall, the gap between NEP 2020 vision and classroom reality is not merely implementation delay but reflects deeper systemic issues such as teacher preparation, infrastructure inequality, and entrenched assessment practices. This highlights that achieving inclusive education requires not only policy reform but also sustained institutional support and pedagogical transformation.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1.Regular and structured in-service teacher training should be conducted with a focus on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and classroom management of diverse learners.
- 2.Efforts should be made to manage class size to allow better individual attention.

- 3.Schools should adopt a flexible curriculum approach that allows adaptation according to learners' abilities and learning pace.
- 4.Greater emphasis should be placed on activity-based, inquiry-based learning methods and experiential learning methods in classrooms.
- 5.Schools should ensure availability of assistive resources such as screen readers, text-to-speech tools, Braille materials, hearing aids, captioned content, adaptive learning platforms, visual aids, and digital devices and support systems for CWSN.
- 6.Structured enrichment activities should be provided for gifted learners to nurture their abilities such as advanced coursework, project-based learning, research activities, mentorship programs, Olympiad preparation, creative and critical thinking tasks, problem-solving workshops, and participation in academic competitions can help develop the potential of gifted learners.
- 7.Improvement in digital infrastructure and ICT training for teachers is necessary to enhance inclusive practices.
- 8.Effective monitoring mechanisms should be developed to support implementation of NEP 2020 at the school level.
- 9.School leadership should actively promote an inclusive school culture through awareness programs and supportive policies.
- 10.Continuous assessment practices should be used instead of only exam-based evaluation to better understand diverse learner progress.
- 11.Better coordination between policy planners and school-level implementation should be strengthened to reduce the gap between NEP 2020 vision and practice.

Conclusion

National Education Policy 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for promoting inclusive education through equity, flexibility, and learner-centered practices. It envisions learning environments where all students, including CWSN, SEDGs, and gifted learners, receive appropriate support to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. However, the present analysis indicates that a gap still exists between the policy vision and its implementation in secondary school classrooms. Although the policy emphasizes inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction and experiential learning, these are not yet fully reflected in actual classroom practices due to various practical constraints.

CONCLUSION

National Education Policy 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for promoting inclusive education through equity, flexibility, and learner-centered practices. It envisions learning environments where all students, including CWSN, SEDGs, and gifted learners, receive appropriate support to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. However, the present analysis indicates that a gap still exists between the policy vision and its implementation in secondary school classrooms. Although the policy emphasizes inclusive strategies such as differentiated instruction and experiential learning, these are not yet fully reflected in actual classroom practices due to various practical constraints.

REFERENCES

- National Education Policy 2020*. (2020). Ministry of Education, Government of India. <https://www.education.gov.in>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Inclusion and education: All means all*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
- National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2022). *Inclusive education practices in schools: A review report*. NCERT. <https://ncert.nic.in>
- Sharma, R., & Singh, P. (2022). Teacher readiness for inclusive education in secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(2), 45–58.
- Kumar, A. (2021). Challenges in implementing inclusive classroom practices in India. *International Journal of Education and Development*, 9(1), 23–34.
- Reddy, S. (2022). Traditional teaching practices and inclusion in secondary education. *Indian Journal of Teacher Education*, 18(3), 60–72.
- Singh, M. (2023). Effectiveness of activity-based learning in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of School Education Studies*, 15(1), 10–21.
- Agarwal, N. (2021). Learning needs of gifted students in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Gifted Education Research*, 7(2), 33–41.
- Verma, L. (2022). Role of school leadership in inclusive education implementation. *Educational Management Review*, 11(4), 88–97.
- Mehta, P. (2023). Technology integration for inclusive education in secondary schools. *Journal of Digital Learning in Education*, 6(1), 15–27.