Study of Quality Infrastructure of Special Education Schools: NEP- 2020

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Abstract:

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes inclusive and equitable education, highlighting the importance of providing quality infrastructure in special education schools. This research paper explores the state of infrastructure in special education schools across India and evaluates its alignment with the objectives outlined in NEP 2020. The study investigates critical aspects such as physical accessibility, availability of assistive technologies, specialized teaching aids, and teacher training programs tailored for students with diverse disabilities. Through a mixed-methods approach, data from urban and rural special education institutions were analysed to identify gaps in resources, funding, and policy implementation. The research reveals significant challenges, including uneven distribution of resources, lack of trained personnel, and inadequate support for integrating technology into learning. However, promising developments such as increased policy focus, community partnerships, and funding initiatives are also noted. The paper provides actionable recommendations to enhance infrastructure, including leveraging technology, building capacity among educators, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders. The findings aim to contribute to the effective implementation of NEP 2020, ensuring quality education for students with special needs and promoting an inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: *Quality Infrastructure, Special Education Schools, NEP- 2020*

Introduction

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift in India's educational framework, emphasizing inclusivity, equity, and the comprehensive development of all learners, especially those with disabilities. Central to achieving these objectives is the quality of special education infrastructure, which encompasses accessible physical spaces, supportive resources, adaptive technologies, and systems designed to meet diverse learner needs. This article assesses the condition of such infrastructure before and after the policy's implementation, analysing reforms, challenges, and opportunities within the Indian educational environment (Vyas,2021). NEP 2020

introduces a clear focus on creating accessible and resource-rich environments to eliminate barriers that have historically hindered children with disabilities. Key policy measures include the use of assistive devices, inclusion of early childhood support programs, and enhancing teacher preparedness through dedicated training programs. However, the extent of policy implementation shows considerable variation, with factors such as geographical location influencing the availability and quality of facilities and support services. Challenges such as limited financial resources, shortage of trained educators, and insufficient oversight mechanisms continue to affect many institutions, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This study investigates how the aspirations laid out in NEP 2020 are materializing in tangible improvements, highlighting successful strategies and pinpointing areas needing further attention. The goal is to contribute actionable insights that can drive the advancement of equitable and inclusive education infrastructure across India.

Rationale

Education for children with disabilities has long been hindered by a combination of inadequate infrastructure, social stigma, and systemic obstacles that have limited their access to and participation in mainstream education. Recognizing these enduring challenges, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to bridge these gaps through comprehensive measures that include upgrading physical infrastructure, promoting inclusive teaching practices, enhancing teacher training, and ensuring targeted resource allocation. This study aims to rigorously assess how effectively these policy mandates have been implemented on the ground and to what extent they have succeeded in creating truly inclusive and supportive educational environments for children with diverse abilities.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of this study encompasses government, private, and non-governmental special education institutions across India. Data sources include policy documents, government reports, peer-reviewed articles, digital repositories, and contemporary field studies. The analysis is thematic, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence to spotlight both achievements and deficits.

Historical Overview of Special Education Infrastructure in India

Before NEP 2020, India's approach towards special education infrastructure was fragmented. Disability inclusion was typically considered supplementary rather than integral to educational planning. Infrastructure in most schools fell short of universal access standards, as defined by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016. Most schools lacked basic accessibility features such as ramps, accessible toilets, and ergonomic classrooms for children with physical and sensory impairments. Additionally, specialized teaching modules and assistive technologies were seldom implemented, and schools generally had limited capacity to support inclusive extracurricular

activities, restricting opportunities for holistic development of students with disabilities. Government interventions such as Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC, 1974), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2000), and the RPWD Act, 2016 paved the way for more inclusive policy frameworks. However, implementation remained patchy, with responsibility often devolved to state governments without standardized benchmarks or sustained funding (Vyas, 2021).

NEP 2020: Vision and Provisions for Infrastructure

The NEP 2020 introduces several visionary objectives aimed at universalizing access to quality education, regardless of disability.

Universal Accessibility

NEP 2020 envisions:

Disability-friendly infrastructure has emerged as a critical priority under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, requiring every school to provide accessible toilets, ramps, elevators, and tactile pathways to ensure barrier-free mobility for learners with disabilities. Complementing these physical provisions, the policy emphasizes the integration of assistive technologies such as Braille books, large-print materials, audio-visual aids, and adaptive digital devices that support diverse learning needs and promote active participation in the classroom. Furthermore, institutions are mandated to establish resource centres and structured support mechanisms for children with severe or multiple disabilities, thereby strengthening specialized services and ensuring equitable access to quality education (Aneraye, et al. 2024).

Teacher Recruitment and Training

The NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education by mandating the recruitment of teachers with cross-disability training and making special certificate programs universally accessible for continuous upskilling. It also outlines clear professional development pathways for special educators, enabling their progression into leadership roles in educational administration and teacher training. Furthermore, the policy promotes the adoption and standardization of Indian Sign Language (ISL) in curriculum development to ensure accessibility and equal learning opportunities for children with hearing impairments.

Educational Resource Centres

- Establishment of resource centres and special accommodations for benchmarking learning outcomes with reasonable adjustments for academic fulfilment.
- Investment in diversified assessment mechanisms such as PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) (NEP. 2020).

School Complexes

A new model proposes clusters of schools within a 5-10 km radius consolidating resources, special educators, and infrastructure. This approach aims for optimal management and equitable distribution of support services but brings its own set of practical issues for children with mobility challenges (Sarkar, 2020)

Existing State of Special Education Infrastructure

Despite these provisions, significant gaps persist in the implementation of accessibility measures in schools. As of 2023, fewer than 70% of schools had ramps, and only 60% had accessible toilets, while ergonomic classrooms remain scarce, particularly in rural areas (IME Research, 2025). Additionally, there is a chronic shortage of special educators, with some districts assigning a single educator to oversee up to 150 schools, resulting in insufficient personalized attention for students with disabilities (Sarkar, 2020). Furthermore, only a limited number of schools, primarily urban and elite institutions, have integrated assistive technologies or digital learning platforms designed to support multiple disabilities.

Case Studies

Urban Schools

Urban private and public schools generally demonstrate higher infrastructure investment, with several institutions fully complying with RPWD standards. These schools maintain accessible facilities through regular upkeep, operate dedicated resource centers, employ full-time special educators, and implement digital inclusion initiatives, including interactive whiteboards and assistive software, to ensure that students with disabilities receive comprehensive support and equitable learning opportunities.

Rural and Semi-Urban Schools

Implementation of inclusive education is often hindered by limited funding and low awareness, resulting in slow infrastructural upgrades. Consequently, a significant number of children with disabilities are compelled to rely on home-based learning due to the absence of suitable physical infrastructure (IME Research, 2025).

Policy Implementation: Gaps and Challenges

Funding and Resource Allocation

Budgetary constraints and the limited prioritization of special education in district-level planning significantly impede the timely upgrading of existing educational infrastructure. Many schools struggle to allocate sufficient funds for accessibility modifications, adaptive learning resources, or the hiring of trained personnel, which slows the overall implementation of inclusive practices. Compounding this issue, the maintenance and monitoring of accessible facilities are often sporadic

and poorly coordinated, resulting in underutilized or non-functional ramps, assistive devices, and resource centres. These challenges point to critical gaps in regulatory oversight, where existing policies and standards, such as those mandated by the RPWD Act, are inadequately enforced, leaving many children with disabilities without the support and infrastructure necessary for equitable learning.

Regulatory Oversight

Oversight bodies lack the legal authority to enforce minimally acceptable standards in special education infrastructure. Additionally, information regarding special schools' compliance, infrastructure quality, staffing, and learning outcomes remains opaque (Sarkar, 2020).

Social Attitudes and Stigma

Enduring biases against children with disabilities among parents, educators, and classmates limit the optimal use of available resources. Additionally, the lack of awareness and sensitization initiatives in numerous regions sustains exclusion, despite improvements in infrastructure.

Technology and Digital Divide

In India, access to digital learning resources for children with disabilities remains highly uneven, with only a small fraction of schools—particularly in rural areas—having reliable internet connectivity or access to digital assistive tools. This digital divide significantly limits the ability of students to benefit from online educational content or adaptive technologies designed to support diverse learning needs. Moreover, most digital learning solutions are not localized or tailored to accommodate different types of disabilities, which further reduces their effectiveness. The lack of context-specific customization, combined with inadequate infrastructure, reinforces educational inequities and hampers inclusive learning initiatives (IME Research, 2025).

NEP 2020 in Practice: Successes and Innovations

National Initiatives

States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are piloting comprehensive inclusion models that integrate infrastructure upgrades with active teacher training, parental engagement, and digital outreach initiatives. Additionally, certain private-sector collaborations have introduced low-cost assistive technologies and mobile app–based assessment tools to support children with learning disabilities, enhancing accessibility and personalized learning opportunities.

School Complex Concept

- The "school complex" model allows for pooling of resources and expertise, optimizing special educator time.

- Specialized transportation options and collaborative activities across schools are being gradually introduced to address mobility issues.

Assessment and Monitoring

Implementation of formative and competency-based assessments tailored to each learner's abilities and learning mode is underway.

Infrastructure Adaptations

Accessibility measures in schools differ significantly based on location, available funding, and the commitment of stakeholders. Common physical adaptations include ramps and elevators to support mobility-impaired students, sound amplification systems and tactile signage for children with sensory disabilities, and ergonomic furniture designed for students with orthopaedic needs. Such measures aim to create an inclusive learning environment by addressing diverse physical and sensory requirements, though their implementation often varies widely across regions and institutions.

Use of Assistive Technology

- Braille books and audio instructional aids for visual disabilities.
- Speech-to-text tools, sign language interpretation, and visual learning materials for hearing and speech impairments.
- Computer-based individualized learning modules for cognitive and intellectual disabilities.

Resource Centre Functionality

Resource centres function as pivotal hubs for specialized instruction, supplemental materials, therapy, and technological support for children with disabilities. Effective centres typically employ qualified staff across multiple specialties, provide library facilities with accessible books and media, and ensure integration with mainstream classrooms. This integration facilitates smooth transitions for students, promotes inclusive learning, and minimizes segregation, allowing children to benefit from both specialized attention and broader social and educational engagement.

Challenges in Implementation

The actualization of quality inclusive school infrastructure is systematically undermined by implementation bottlenecks across state and local administrative levels. The constitutional status of education as a concurrent subject has resulted in states prioritizing varied infrastructure investment mechanisms, leading to significant inter-state disparities and a lack of consistent, uniform monitoring. While the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, legally empowers authorities to derecognize non-compliant schools, the actual implementation of this enforcement is slow and often met with resistance, particularly from private educational institutions. Furthermore, logistical strategies intended to optimize resource sharing, such as school cluster models, can unintentionally

impose new barriers by increasing travel times for children with disabilities in regions lacking adequate transport. This entire process is critically compromised by a prevailing culture of systemic maintenance backlogs, which causes newly installed facilities to quickly suffer frequent breakdowns and underutilization, preventing capital investment from achieving sustained functional accessibility.

Recommendations

Achieving a truly inclusive educational ecosystem demands a synchronized, multi-stakeholder strategy focused on systemic commitment and local execution. Policymakers must allocate dedicated, robust budgets for both accessibility upgrades and routine maintenance, establishing strict monitoring mechanisms and public disclosure to guarantee sustained compliance with infrastructure standards. This financial commitment must be reinforced by state governments, which need to design tailored action plans informed by successful regional models, such as those seen in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, while simultaneously setting up dedicated monitoring units for real-time intervention and feedback. At the school level, leadership is vital for promoting inclusion by engaging parents and community organizations to mobilize resources and implement peer sensitization programs, thereby dismantling attitudinal barriers and reducing stigma. Furthermore, the human resource component requires substantial investment: educators must engage in continuous professional development and specialized workshops, fostering collaboration with resource staff to enhance student support; meanwhile, technology providers must prioritize the development of localized, affordable EdTech solutions that incorporate vernacular language and cultural adaptation to effectively address the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 sets forth a progressive vision for special education infrastructure, articulating clear mandates for accessible, equitable, and inclusive schooling environments for all. However, translating this policy intent into widespread reality requires overcoming persistent challenges in the consistent adoption and reliable maintenance of quality facilities, especially across under-served regions. Achieving the NEP 2020's transformative potential necessitates a concerted approach involving sustained financial investment, robust accountability and comprehensive regulatory mechanisms, innovative solutions, and strong leadership to ensure the long-term functionality of the inclusive ecosystem.

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