

## **INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: NAVIGATING NEP 2020**

### **Abstract**

Inclusive education plays an essential role in creating inclusive learning environments where all teacher aspirants, regardless of background or ability, can flourish. Inclusive teacher education is at the core of India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and is essential for achieving this vision. Inclusive Teacher Education (ITE) is a key component of the NEP 2020 in India. This chapter looks at the current status, challenges, and research findings related to inclusive teacher education under the NEP 2020 framework. Drawing on the latest research studies, the chapter proposes a general framework for Integrated Teacher Education in the country and identifies areas for improvements required to equip Teacher Education Institutes (TIS) to be inclusive teacher education ready. The chapter also provides actionable recommendations on how to improve inclusive teacher education scenario in the light of NEP 2020.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive education, Teacher education, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Diversity, Inclusive pedagogy, Teacher attitudes, Assistive technology, Capacity building, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is more than just a concept; it is the foundation of social progress. It seeks to create a level playing field for all learners, irrespective of their background or aptitude level. In India, NEP 2020 marks a milestone in the journey towards inclusive education. In this chapter, we explore the scope, issues, research findings and the future of inclusive teacher education in the light of NEP 2020 in India.

## II. INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION: DEFINITION

What is Inclusive Teacher Education (ITE)? Inclusive Teacher Education (UNESCO, 2017 & 2019) equips educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential to support and meet the unique needs of all learners in the classroom and associated learning environments. It empowers educators to create an inclusive learning environment that accommodates students from diverse backgrounds, abilities and learning styles. Inclusive educators' education focuses on understanding and addressing obstacles to learning, diversity and equity, inclusive pedagogy practices, and the use of appropriate tools and support systems to promote the academic and social well-being of every student in their classrooms.

## III. SCOPE OF ITE UNDER NEP 2020

NEP 2020 aims to address the various needs of students around the nation by creating an inclusive education system. This goal requires inclusive teacher education as a key component. The policy places a strong emphasis on providing educators with the information, abilities, and mindsets needed to establish inclusive learning environments. It promotes a comprehensive method of preparing teachers, introducing inclusive pedagogy, diversity, and special needs education modules into teacher education curricula.

On scanning the pages of the official documents of NEP 2020, it clearly advocates many significant input leading to the evolution of a practice of Inclusive Teacher Education in the country in the years to come like: **Inclusive Education Pedagogy** (*preparing teachers to address the diverse learning needs of all students, including those with disabilities, socio-economic disadvantages, and other marginalized groups*), **Diversity Sensitization** (*incorporation of modules or courses aimed at sensitizing teachers to diversity issues, including caste, gender, religion, language, ethnicity, and disability in the Teacher Education curriculum*), **Multi-Lingual Education** (*imparting training to teachers in techniques for effectively handling students whose first language may differ from the language of instruction*), **Special Education Training** (*Teacher education programmes should provide specialized training in special education includes training in inclusive teaching practices, assistive technologies, and individualized education planning*), **Flexible Teacher Education Pathways** (*diversifying pathways into teaching to attract a wider range of candidates, including those from marginalized communities which may include alternative certification programs, distance education, and flexible learning strategies tailored to the needs of different learners*), **Continuous Professional Development** (*in order to help teachers involved in inclusive education to remain competent and effective in meeting the diverse needs of their students*), **Collaborative Learning Communities** (*establishing avenues for teachers to share their best practices, resources, and support each other in order to address*

the challenges of inclusive education which may include professional learning communities, mentoring programmes, and peer-to-peer network)

Furthermore, NEP 2020 emphasises the integration of technology in education, which provide opportunities to enhance inclusive practices. Digital tools and platforms can facilitate personalized learning experiences, making education more accessible to students with diverse learning needs.

#### IV. SELECTED RESEARCH INPUTS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Though specific research on Inclusive Teacher Education is almost non-available; studies on inclusive education are sufficiently available to probe for an essential review of literature. A few selected studies and write-ups (collected from the secondary sources and digital depositories) are summarised in the following table for a quick glance of the current trends and practices of inclusivity in classrooms.

**Table 1:** Summary of Selected Related Literature cum Research Findings on Inclusive Education

Literature/ Research Studies	Content Summary/Major Findings
<i>Assessment of Inclusive Education Practices in India</i> , Sharma, R., & Gupta, S. (2022).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified a lack of awareness and understanding among teachers regarding inclusive practices.</li> <li>Highlighted the need for targeted training programmes focusing on inclusive pedagogy and classroom management techniques</li> </ul>
<i>Inclusive Education: A Global Perspective</i> , Anderson, J., Boyle, C., & Vaz, S. (Eds.). (2018).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This edited volume provides a comprehensive overview of inclusive education practices from a global perspective.</li> <li>It features contributions from international experts in the field, covering topics such as policy frameworks, teacher preparation, curriculum development, and community engagement in inclusive education.</li> </ul>
<i>Impact of Inclusive Pedagogy on Student Learning Outcomes</i> , Patel, A., & Singh, M. (2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Found a positive correlation between inclusive pedagogy and students' academic performance.</li> <li>Students in inclusive classrooms demonstrated higher levels of engagement, participation, and social interaction, leading to improved learning outcomes across subject disciplines.</li> </ul>
<i>Promoting Inclusive Education: International Perspectives</i> , Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (Eds.). (2018).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This edited volume examines inclusive education policies, practices, and innovations in various countries, highlighting strategies for supporting students with diverse needs in mainstream educational settings.</li> <li>Drawing on empirical research and case studies, the book offers practical insights and recommendations for advancing inclusive education globally.</li> </ul>

<p><b><i>Inclusive Education: Evidence Based Practices from Around the World</i></b>, Florian, L. (Ed.). (2014).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It synthesizes research findings and case studies to showcase effective strategies for promoting the academic and social inclusion of students with disabilities and diverse learning needs.</li> <li>• The book examines key issues such as teacher preparation, curriculum adaptation, classroom management, and parental involvement in inclusive education, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Teacher Attitudes and Inclusive Education in India</i></b>, Khan, F., &amp; Mishra, P. (2023).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explored the attitudes of pre-service and in-service teachers towards inclusive education.</li> <li>• Identified positive correlations between teacher attitudes and the implementation of inclusive practices.</li> <li>• Emphasised the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion among teachers.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Role of Assistive Technology in Inclusive Classrooms</i></b>, Reddy, S., &amp; Kumar, A. (2020).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examined the impact of assistive technology on enhancing access to education and found that the integration of assistive technology facilitated personalized learning experiences and improved academic outcomes for students with diverse learning needs.</li> </ul>

These reviews offer insightful analyses of inclusive education policies, practices, and research outcomes from throughout the world. They provide educators, decision-makers, scholars, and other interested parties with a plethora of information to help advance inclusive education worldwide and the design of a vision framework for Inclusive Teacher Education is easily possible in the light of the existing research base and literature review.

## V. INCLUSIVE TEACHER EDUCATION: A VISION FRAMEWORK

It is imperative in the NEP 2020 recommendations that a systematic framework of design of ITE is essential and possible in our country to realize the aims and objectives of inclusivity and the accommodation of divergence among the Teacher Aspirants of our time. The following schema would be helpful in consolidating a comprehensive picture of such a design.

**Table 2:** Inclusive Teacher Education: A Vision-Mission-Action Framework

Vision	To create Inclusive Learning Environment where every Student, Regardless of Background or Ability, can Thrive and Flourish to their Best		
Mission	To Equip Teachers with the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities necessary to foster Inclusive Classrooms and Promote the Academic and Social Success of all Learners		
Goals	To Enhance Teachers'	To Develop	To Create

	Understanding of Diversity and Inclusion		Inclusive Pedagogical Practices		Supportive Learning
Objectives	Provide Training on Recognizing and Valuing Diverse Identities, background and abilities		Environments Equip Teachers with Strategies for Differentiated Instruction and Assessment		Establish Inclusive Classroom Norms and Expectations
	Foster Awareness of Societal Inequalities and their Impact on Education		Promote Collaborative Learning and Peer Support among Students.		Implement Positive Behaviours Management Strategies and Conflict Resolution Techniques
Functional Components	Curriculum and Instruction	Professional Development	Assessment And Evaluation	Collaboration and Partnership	Policy and Advocacy

A detailed description of the functional components in the frame work is elaborated as given below:

**Curriculum and Instruction:** While incorporating ITE in Teacher Education system, the Teacher Educators face the question of how to design the curriculum and the instructional practices. They have to undertake the challenges to:

- Develop a comprehensive teacher education curriculum that integrates modules on diversity, Inclusion and Special needs of education.
- Provide hands-on experience and practicum experiences to Student-Teachers in diverse classroom settings to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life scenario.
- Need to utilize case studies, simulations and role-playing exercises to enhance understanding of inclusive pedagogy and effective classroom management.

**Professional Development:** While practicing the ITE, a few measures to nurture and maintain the professional Development of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers need to be undertaken like:

- Offer ongoing professional development opportunities for in-service teachers to deepen their understanding of inclusive practices and stay updated on emerging trends and research.
- Provide access to resources such as online courses, webinars and peer-learning communities, to support continuous professional development.
- Collaborate with educational experts, disability advocates, and community organisations to provide specialised training and workshops on specific topics related to inclusive education.

**Assessment and Evaluation:** For a smooth conduct and progress of the ITE suitable means of assessment and evaluations are to be designed and implemented. The plausible suggestions proposed are:

- Develop assessment tools and rubrics to measure teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to inclusive education.
- Conduct formative assessments to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement throughout the teacher education programme.
- Utilize feedback from students, peers, and mentors to inform programmatic adjustments to enhance effectiveness.

**Collaboration and Partnership:** Collaboration and partnership are essential for hands-on-experience and practical knowledge while practicing Inclusive Teacher Education. The initiatives must be in tune with the following suggestions.

- Forge partnerships with schools, district authorities, and educational institutions to facilitate field experiences and practicum placements for pre-service teachers.
- Collaborate with community organizations, advocacy groups, and parents to promote inclusive practices and to support students with diverse needs.
- Establish networks and professional associations to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and advocacy efforts in the field of inclusive teacher education.

**Policy and Advocacy:** Societal Interventions and legislative support are also essential to ensure legal and administrative support base for meaningful implementation of policy guidelines. The interventions could be organised through:

- Advocate for policies and legislation that support inclusive education and allocate resources towards teacher training and professional development in this area.
- Engage stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and students, in dialogue and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of inclusive teacher education.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of policies and initiatives on inclusive practices and student outcomes, and advocate for evidence-based approaches to inform future decision-making.

With an emphasis on increasing teachers' capacity to create inclusive learning environments and meet the different needs of all students, this design framework offers an organised method for creating and delivering Inclusive Teacher Education programmes in Universities and Colleges.

### **Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Teacher Education (ITE)**

Though the NEP 2020 has strong evidences for an Inclusive Teacher Education curriculum in the country; despite the noble intentions outshined in the policy document, its implementation has to face many challenges; a few of which require immediate and genuine attention from all stakeholders in the field.

The various challenges identified are: *Infrastructure and Resources, Attitudinal Barriers and Stigma, Limited Access to Resources, Lack of Inclusive Pedagogical Training, Inadequate Support System and Policy-Practice Gaps*. Challenges seems to be hurdles but are in fact opportunities for a progressing society. With the determination and purpose behind the

Programme of Action of recent implementation of the recommendations in NEP 2020 is observed, we have to be optimistic about the development of a meaningful Inclusive Teacher Education practice in India, in future. The following table will throw a streak of light into the various dimensions of the above said challenges and possible remediation of the same.

**Table 3:** Description of Challenges and their Remediation to ITE

<b>Areas of Challenges</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Remediation</b>
<b>Infrastructure and Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack accessible classrooms in Teacher Education Institution (TEIs)</li> <li>• No/Partial ICT labs</li> <li>• Absence of assistive technology resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased Governmental funding for modernizing teacher education colleges</li> <li>• Collaboration with educational agencies/NGOs to supply assistive technology inputs to TEIs</li> <li>• Partnership development of existing TEIs with community centers for resource sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Attitudinal Barriers and Stigma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative attitudes, biases, and stigma towards students with disabilities or diverse backgrounds which may hinder/retard the pace of implementation of inclusive education practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation of awareness campaign and diversity training sessions to teachers, Practitioners, Parents and Public.</li> <li>• Strict adherence of inclusive language policy and communication guidelines among professionals and students.</li> <li>• Establish Support Groups and Peer Mentoring Programme for educators to share their experiences to overcome the attitudinal barriers in schools.</li> </ul>
<b>Limited Access to Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many TEIs lack sufficient resources such as specialized training materials, assistive technologies, and inclusive curriculum resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate dedicated funding for the development and dissemination of inclusive teaching materials, textbooks, and digital resources.</li> <li>• Create online repositories and resource hubs to facilitate access to inclusive education materials for educators, students, and parents.</li> <li>• Foster partnerships with corporate sponsors, philanthropic organizations, and international agencies to donate resources and support inclusive teacher education initiatives.</li> </ul>

<b>Lack of Inclusive Pedagogical Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes often do not adequately prepare educators with the knowledge and skills necessary for inclusive teaching practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate modules on inclusive pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and differentiated instruction into teacher education curricula.</li> <li>• Provide hands-on training experiences, including practicum placements in diverse classroom settings, to apply inclusive teaching strategies in practices.</li> <li>• Offer ongoing professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and online courses, to support educators in enhancing their inclusive pedagogical skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Inadequate Support System</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers may lack sufficient support systems and professional networks to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities or special educational needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish mentorship programs pairing novice teachers with experienced inclusive educators to provide guidance and support.</li> <li>• Develop peer learning communities and online forums where teachers can collaborate, share resources, and seek advice on inclusive teaching practices.</li> <li>• Provide access to specialized support services, such as educational psychologists, counselors, and special education professionals, to assist teachers in meeting the diverse needs of their students.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy-Practice Gaps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is often a disparity between inclusive education policies at the national or state level and their implementation in schools and classrooms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen coordination and communication between policymakers, education authorities, and school administrators to ensure alignment of policies with on-the-ground realities.</li> <li>• Provide professional development opportunities for educators to understand and implement inclusive education policies effectively.</li> <li>• Establish feedback mechanisms and monitoring systems to track the implementation of inclusive education policies and identify areas for improvements.</li> </ul>



To address these issues, policymakers, educators, stakeholders, and community leaders must work together to establish a climate that supports inclusive teacher education and ensures that all learners have equitable access to high-quality education.

## VI. ROLE OF NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION (NCTE) IN ITE

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), being the apex regulatory body of Teacher Education in India, has a pivotal role in formulating an ideal launching pad for the Inclusive Teacher Education (ITE) in the context of the implementation of the four year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) proposed in the NEP 2020. NCTE's role encompasses several key functions tailored to the structure and objectives of the Inclusive Teacher Education framework propose through Figure 1, namely: **Setting Inclusive Standards and Guidelines** (*Developing/amending and updating NCTE standards and guidelines specific to the four-year Integrated Teacher Education programs, ensuring that they incorporate Inclusive Teacher Education principles and practices*), **Accreditation and Recognition** (*By evaluating compliance with the set/established standards, including those related to inclusive education, the NCTE has to ensures that Teacher Education Institutions provide high-quality teacher preparation aligned with the scope of ITEP proposed in NEP 2020*), **Curriculum Development and Implementation** (*The proposed National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education need to be integrated with principles of inclusive pedagogy, differentiation, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to equip future teachers with the requisite competencies for inclusive practices*), **Teacher Preparation and Professional Development** (*along with the overseeing of the Teacher competency development of pre-service teacher education through ensuring the incorporation of inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and assistive technology use; NCTE has to focus on a nationwide monitoring of the Continuous Professional Development of in-service teachers through appropriate amendments in the NCTE act and manuals*), and **Research, Evaluation and Advocacy** (*NCTE must supports empirical research to assess the effectiveness of inclusive practices in ITEP, evaluates the impact of teacher education programme, and advocates for policy reforms to strengthen inclusive education provisions in line with NEP 2020*).

By fulfilling these mandates, the NCTE plays a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of Inclusive Teacher Education within the framework of the four-year Integrated Teacher Education programme (ITEP) proposed in NEP 2020.

## VII. THE WAY FORWARD

Inclusive Teacher Education stands at the forefront of India's educational reform efforts under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. To effectively address the challenges and grab the opportunities presented by this policy, a multifaceted approach is essential. Firstly, comprehensive capacity-building initiatives must be prioritized, targeting both teacher educators and in-service teachers. By focusing on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and the utilization of assistive technology, educators can better meet the diverse needs of their students and foster inclusive learning environment.

Equally important is the strengthening the infrastructure of Teacher Education Institutions is paramount. Allocating resources towards improving facilities such as ICT labs, accessible classrooms, and resource centers for special education needs would facilitate the implementation of inclusive practices. This investment not only enhances the physical learning environment but also underscores the commitment to inclusivity within the education systems. A nationwide mission on reviving the infrastructure network of TEIs is essential in strengthening the Inclusive Teacher Education movement in the country.

Promotion of research and innovation in inclusive teacher education is also vital. By encouraging collaboration between academia, government, and NGOs, research initiatives can drive evidence-based practices and informed policy decisions. Through grants, scholarships, and partnerships, researchers can explore innovative approaches to inclusive education, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving needs. Special budget provisions also could be earmarked for strengthening the Inclusive Teacher Education movement in India as a tangible outcome of the recommendations of NEP 2020.

More significantly, establishing robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of inclusive teacher education programme is imperative. By tracking outcomes such as student achievement, retention rates, and teacher satisfaction, progress can be assessed, lessons could be learned, and adjustments can be made to further enhance the effectiveness of Inclusive Education Initiatives in the country.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Inclusive Teacher Education is not just a goal but a fundamental pillar of India's educational landscape under NEP 2020. Through concerted efforts to address challenges, leverage research findings, and adopt strategic approaches, India can pave the way towards a more equitable and inclusive future for all learners. By prioritizing capacity-building, infrastructure development, research and innovation, advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation, the vision of an inclusive education system in India can be realized, ensuring that no learner is left behind.

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