



National Education Policy 2020 and Scope for Universal Design of Learning

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Abstract: Each child enters the learning environment with diverse educational needs which must be catered and fulfilled to ensure that each student becomes an important and integrated member of the society. The NEP 2020 has been envisioned with keeping in focus, the future needs and beliefs of India. It emphasizes on Inclusive and equitable education which is also critical for achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive, and contribute to the nation.

Universal Design of Learning stresses on creating flexible learning environment for each learner. It regards each learner as a comprehensive block which is needed to complete the whole scenery of education. This paper, appreciate ways in which NEP 2020, as a vision document supports UDL. It highlights the principles underlying the UDL curriculum, its components and how these can be applied to provide inclusive settings in an Indian classroom.

Key words: UDL, NEP, Inclusive settings, Indian schools

I. INTRODUCTION

Though every child is unique in his/her own special way but in the pursuit of so-called academic excellence and the pressure of performance, our education policies, since independence, have been following the mantra of "one size fits all". Universal Design of Learning (UDL) talks about creating flexible learning environment and taking care of needs of each child. "The problem is not how to wipe out difference but how to unite with the difference intact"-these lines by famous philosopher-poet Rabindra Nath Tagore, set the tone of implementation of UDL in inclusive classroom settings.

The latest National Education Policy envisions a comprehensive yet robust education system which is rooted firmly in Indian ethos and values that contributes directly to transforming India, sustainably into vibrant knowledge society which talks about equity in society, by providing high-quality education to all strata of society and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower.

II. THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

2020 AND ITS VISION

The National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to

address the growing developmental and economic imperatives of the country as well as globally. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, as per the need of hour including regulation and governance of various bodies involved in disseminating education in the country and to create a new system that is not only aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, but also withholding the India's deep-rooted traditions and value systems.

The National Education Policy (2020) lays great emphasis on the meaningful all-round development of the creative potential of each learner. It is based on the principle that education is a tool to foster not only the cognitive capacities in terms of well defined 'foundational capacities' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving – but also well rooted social, ethical, and emotional capabilities. The core idea of NEP 2020 is "Education is a great leveler and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality. Initiatives must be in place to ensure that all students from such groups, despite inherent obstacles, are provided various targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system"

It is imperative here to note that the global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of UNESCO and adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

As per NEP 2020, A good education institution is one in which every student, irrespective of his/her diverse background and learning abilities is welcomed and cared for, and provided a safe and stimulating learning environment along with wide range of learning experiences and good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning for all students notwithstanding of their physical challenges. NEP stresses that accomplishing these qualities must be the goal of every educational institution.

The Central ideas, as per NEP, that will guide the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions are mentioned below after:

1. Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student -The teachers as well as parents need to be sensitized by means of workshops and seminars so as to ensure that each student is able



to develop well, both in the academic and non-academic spheres of learning.

2. Extensive use of technology- It is a well-known fact that technology must be used in teaching and learning process as it has many advantages. Use of technology can effectively remove language barriers and also increases access for Divyang (differently abled) students. It can also be utilized for more efficient educational planning and management.

3. Full equity and inclusion – The NEP emphasizes that Full Equity and Inclusion constitute the foundation of all educational decisions. Only if these principles are followed to the core then we can ensure that students prosper and gain benefit in the education system.

4. Education is a public service –Just like other basic rights which an Indian citizen enjoys, it must be realized that access to quality education be considered a basic right of every child. Only then it will be possible that the vision of NEP is achieved.

III. HOW UDL SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

UDL is considered as an approach which makes general education curriculum more accessible to learners regardless of their diversity in ability, learning style, language or culture (Jimenez et.al.2007). As quoted by Rose & Meyer, 2006 in Jimenez et.al, 2007 “Grounded in research of learner differences, the capacities of new media & the most effective teaching practices and assessments, UDL provides a framework for creating more robust learning outcomes for everyone”.

UDL is a framework which helps teachers to design their instructions based on three fundamental principles as approved by CAST (The Centre for Applied Special Technology).

(a) **Multiple means of Representation: This principle stresses on the “WHAT” of learning. It provides options**

- For customizing the display of information and offering alternatives for auditory & visual information.
- For building language and symbols by supporting decoding of text, mathematical notations and symbols. It also aims to promote understanding across languages.
- For comprehension by activating background knowledge & by guiding information processing and visualization.

(b) **Multiple means of Expression: This principle talks about the “HOW” of learning. It provides options**

- For physical action by allowing various methods for response and navigation.

- For expression and communication by using multiple media for communication, construction & composition.
- For providing guidance for appropriate goal settings and support planning and strategic development.

(c) **Multiple means of Engagement: This principle talks about the “WHY” of learning. It provides options**

- By optimizing individual choice & autonomy. It also optimizes relevance, values and authenticity.
- For sustaining efforts and persistence by fostering collaboration and including mastery orientated feedback.
- For self-regulation by promoting expectations and beliefs to optimize motivation. (Source CAST, 2018)

IV. WHICH FACTORS SUPPORT UDL IN INDIA?

Odunavar & Kamaraj, (2018) reports that schools under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2000) follows the “Zero rejection policy”. SSA focuses on education for all, irrespective of abilities, disabilities, caste, gender, socio-economic level, every child has to get education under one roof. The Right to (Free & Compulsory) Education Act, (2009) for all children, including those with disabilities, IECYD (Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities) and the RPDA (Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, (2016)) sets the tone of inclusiveness by Indian government. RPDA emphasized on Universal Design of Learning to meet needs of the persons with disabilities in all walks of life. Draft of the NEP (National Education Policy), 2019 highlights the need for equitable and inclusive education.

Bhattacharya (2017) specifies further that to implement UDL in classroom, we need to design a curriculum which suits all learners. However, it is a great challenge as one wants to have learning outcomes, classroom deliveries and evaluation apply equally to all learners. Sabeena, Gopinath & Mutiaiah (2014) suggest that the principles of UDL can be applied in the inclusive classroom setting. These principles can be used in designing and organizing academic activities and environments so that students can access and engage in the learning process

The idea should be to design a flexible curriculum which can benefit the maximum number of learners. Bhoumik (2019), asserts that UDL supports differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is a way to provide each learner, a designated and differentiated environment wherein each learner can work/progress at his/her own pace. The self-paced learning journey along with various optimized (age/level appropriate) challenges helps each one to become an independent learner. UDL can be considered a practice where flexible strategies are embedded into curriculum. Draft of the NEP



(National Education Policy), 2019 highlights the need for equitable and inclusive education.

Misquitta & Joshi, (2020) reports about a line of action proposed in the Draft of NEP, 2019. Digital technologies (DT) is being recommended as a potential teaching strategy to improve academic experience of children with disabilities. DT as an extension of UDL has the immense potential to transform the learning experience for students with disabilities.

Effective Ways to Implement UDL as per NEP guidelines

1. Involvement of EEE (Education Engagement Entertainment) and VAK (Visual Audio Kinesthetic) approaches: - Incorporation of these approaches in lesson plan will surely help in meaningful engagement of learners.

2. Use of concept of "Innovative classrooms":- An innovative classroom with below mentioned features will lead to more inclusive settings and will justify the NEP guidelines

- A) Supportive & comforting learning environment
- B) Creative & flexible spaces of learning
- c) Accessible teachers
- d) Student centered learning
- e) Fearless & innovative classroom environment

3. Change in School Culture:-

It is vital that all participants in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students be sensitized to the requirements of all students. Awareness must be generated about the notions of inclusion and equity, and the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons.

4. Overhaul of Teacher Education

The proposed changes in the prevalent education system can be achieved only by bringing in radical reforms in teacher education, which can be achieved by:

a) Meaningful Inclusion and reasonable equity must be included as a key aspect of teacher education. Colleges and institutes imparting teacher training as various levels must try to incorporate these aspects as the core of the teacher training program.

b) Rigorous and intensive workshops and training programmes must be conducted to sensitize school leaders, principals, administrators, and people holding other positions in schools about real meaning of Inclusion and Equity.

c) Efforts must be made to train existing teachers (through in service programmes short term online courses/ regular workshops) and bring in leaders from SEDGs in order to provide excellent role models to students.

5. Inclusive School Curriculum

It is very important that the school curriculum must include material on basic human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance and human rights but also incorporates gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity.

To make this happen, the following must be ensured:

- a) Teachers, trained social workers and counsellors must work together to sensitize the students towards this new paradigm shift.
- b) Careful planning and implementation of the school curriculum must be done achieve this goal.
- c) No biases and stereotypes whatsoever should be there at all in the school curriculum. It should include only material relevant and relatable to all the communities.

CONCLUSION

Though NEP (2020) leads the way for Inclusion and Equity in Education but the actual implementation of efficient and meaningful use of digital technologies and Universal Design of learning is definitely a long road ahead. Policy makers and Curriculum Developers need to ensure that UDL is implemented in its true spirit so that the goals of NEP 2020 can be achieved. UDL when implemented in effectual approach can provide ample room of inclusiveness for specially-abled learners.

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