Inclusive Education Policy
for
Open Schooling
2022

National Institute of Open Schooling

(An Autonomous Institution under Ministry of Education, Govt. of India)

ISO 9001 : 2015 Certified

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY
FOR
OPEN SCHOOLING

2022

विद्याधनं सर्वधनप्रधानम्

National Institute of Open Schooling

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to present the Inclusive Education Policy (IEP) 2022 of NIOS. Inclusive Education Policy 2022 is a comprehensive policy document of recommendations to guide all Open Schools across India to ensure inclusivity and equitable access to all students with their diversities, using a multi-pronged, multi-disciplinary and technology-enabled, flexible education system.

In our follow-up to National Education Policy 2020, the IEP 2022 draws from the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. As directed in the National Education Policy 2020, the IEP is developed to guide open schooling systems to actively identify and remove all hurdles to learning. It aims to ensure full participations of all learners irrespective of their economic and social background.

Through a wide range of policy recommendations, NIOS, is trying to ensure that learning opportunities are neither dependent on nor constrained by any disability, sex of the person, gender and subsequent marginalisation.

The National Institute of Open Schooling will strive to operationalise this policy in a time-bound manner to achieve the highest goal of nation building and equity through inclusivity and quality education. NIOS is well recognised for establishing an institutional ethos to nurture inclusiveness in all walks of life. The Inclusive Education Policy will allow further procedures, administrative actions, budgets, and incentives to enable and welcome all learners with their uniqueness and diversity.

Prof. Saroj Sharma
Chairperson, NIOS

ABBREVIATIONS

AI - Accredited Institutes (in the context of NIOS)

AI - Artificial Intelligence

ASHA - Accredited Social Health Activist

AVI - Accredited Vocational Centres

CAASE - Committee for Assuring Accessible and Sustainable Education.

CBC - Capacity Building Cells

CSCs - Common Service Centres

CWSN - Children with Special Needs

D.El.Ed. - Diploma in Elementary Education

DHH - Deaf and Hard of Hearing

DISHA - Disha Centres for early intervention for Person with Disability

DTH - Direct to Home

FSSAI - Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

GER - Gross Enrolment Ratio

IC - Information Communication

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

IEF - Inclusive Education Friendly

ISL - Indian Sign Language

ITDC - India Tourism Development Corporation

IVRS - Interactive Voice Response System

KGBV - Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

LRE - Least Restrictive Environment

LWSN - Learner with Special Needs

MoE - Ministry of Education

MOOC - Massive Open Online Courses

MSDE - Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

MWCD - Ministry of Women and Child Development

NCEN - National Campaign for Enrolment with NIOS

NEP - National Education Policy

NIOS - National Institute of Open Schooling

NVDA - Non-Visual Desktop Access

OBE - Open Basic Education

ODL - Open and Distance Learning

PDF - Portable Document Format

PM e-Vidya - PM e-Vidya is a unique and innovative venture to facilitate multi-mode access to digital/online teaching-learning contents

PR Unit - Public Relations Unit

PwD - Person with Disability

RTE - Right to Education

SAIED - Special Accredited Institutions for Education of the Disadvantaged

SC/ST/OBC - Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/ Other Backward Castes

SEDGs - Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (as defined in NEP 2020)

SSS - Students Support Services

SWAYAM - Study Webs of Active–Learning for Young Aspiring Minds

UNCPRD - United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

UNESCO - United National Educational Scientific Cultural Organization

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNW - United Nations Women

Voc Edu - Vocational Education

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is a continuous and dynamic process of creating opportunities for equal participation in any system irrespective of diversity across people or contexts. In education, this means removing barriers to learning and responding positively to each individual's learning and developmental needs.

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) states that 'inclusive education is a fundamental human right for every child with a disability. An inclusive education system accommodates all students, while also nurturing their abilities and meeting requirements at all levels – pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational, and life-long learning.This necessitates the development of learner-friendly infrastructure that accommodates all learners, particularly those on the margins – such as barrier-free schools, teachers-training for inclusive pedagogical planning, developing curriculum & teaching-learning materials, and a more comprehensive plan for assessment of learning.

The inclusive education principle was established at the "World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality" (Salamanca Statement, Spain 1994) and was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). The Statement urges governments to make inclusive education a policy priority. Several countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, including India have signed and/or ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2008, which recognises the rights of persons with disabilities to educational opportunities, rehabilitation, health, family life, social protection, and employment.

The foundation of ensuring inclusive education lies in acknowledging and addressing the diversity among learners, including physical, cognitive, academic, social, cultural, and emotional differences, and understanding those differences. The Right To Education Act 2009 and the National Education Policy 2020 recognise that inclusive education occurs when every learner succeeds in accessing education and appropriate, meaningful and enabling accommodation of individual requirements is provided; all students are provided age-appropriate education. Towards this end,

the state parties work to provide a system of teaching and learning which is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of all children, children with disability, children from varied socio-economic backgrounds, and from different cultures, ethnic groups, age and gender, etc.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009 emphasises the need for teachers to be made aware of Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education, oriented for and equipped with different kinds of adjustments that schools have to make in terms of infrastructure, curriculum, teaching methods and other school practices to develop professional capacities to address diverse learning needs of all learners.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, focuses on elimination of gender disparities and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable including person with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations.

While inclusive education fulfils the requirements to create an Inclusive Education Friendly (IEF) and Least Restrictive (LR) Environment for disadvantaged learners, it is significantly resourceful for "All" learners.

In brief, Inclusive education signifies that –

1. All learners are welcome with their unique profiles.

2. The institutional ethos is comprehensively designed to nurture inclusiveness in all walks of life.

3. All teachers and staff of the system are equipped to participate and plan for inclusive education.

4. All learners are facilitated and assessed on their strengths and as per their unique educational needs.

5. All learners have equitable access to learning in all types of mode and locations, with appropriate support at all levels of education to get Least Restrictive Environment.

6. All learners are enabled to collaborate and interact with other learners in the system.

7. All the parents are capacitated to contribute effectively to developing inclusive learning spaces.

To fulfil the above and achieve the goal of NEP 2020 and all policy recommendations, a comprehensive policy on inclusive education across all open schooling systems is a must to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.

In this context, NIOS seeks to pro-actively remove all the anticipated and felt barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude pupils with special educational needs. It is committed to providing a relevant curriculum delivered through a pedagogy that reflects the different ways learners learn and create a learning space that includes, rather than excludes them. It recognizes that 'multiple exclusions,' which could be based on disability race, caste, class, gender and ethnicity and location, need to be addressed, and outcome-based educational interventionsneed to be undertaken.The NIOS vision and mission serves as a guiding principle to fulfil the goal of inclusive education.

NIOS Vision: To provide sustainable Inclusive learning with universal and flexible access to quality schools, education and skill development.

NIOS Mission:

➤ To provide relevant, continuing, and holistic education up to pre-degree level through Open and Distance Learning System.

➤ To contribute to Universalisation of School Education.

➤ To cater to the educational needs of the prioritized target groups for equity and social justice.

Large-scale initiatives have been undertaken since Independence, especially after the 1990s. Still, the struggle to achieve the goal of making education accessible to all continues. Millions of children are at risk and get deprived of schooling. Sometimes the teaching and learning mechanism in schools is unfavourable and below the expectations of different stakeholders. The most affected of them are from the

Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBC, Minorities and Trans-people and Children with Disability, who require special assistance.

As per UNICEF policy document on Inclusive Education, *"Inclusive education involves transforming the whole education system - legislation and policy, systems for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education, and the way schools are organised[1]."*

The National Education Policy, 2020 is "in consonance with and fully endorses the recommendations of the Rights of People with Disabilities Act, 2016". (NEP 6.5 Page 24). It places equity and inclusion at its core. Persons from socio-economically marginalised groups and persons with disabilities and those who have difficulty in learning due to language barriers will be protected from segregation and exclusion from education under the policy. In addition, conscious awareness of roles and responsibilities, as well as ensuring community participation, has been attempted to minimise the exclusion of students based on language and disability.

The NIOS seeks to develop and establish an inclusive education system and a culture of inclusivity across its system. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education dramatically, with the remarkable rise of e-learning, where learning is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. The research on the impact of the COVID-19 and any such emergency on learners and recommendations of NEP 2020 will guide NIOS's future work to devise friendlier technologies and systems to reach out to people in diverse backgrounds with diverse capacities and learning abilities.It has been serving the underserved and critical groups as can be seen from the milestones and initiatives since the inception and during recent times.

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[1]https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/IE_summary_accessible_220917_0.pdf

To promote and support inclusive education for all, NIOS has been working with the philosophy of reaching the unreached and pursuing various proactive measures. Some of the significant recent milestones achieved by NIOS in its journey include:

➤ Learning materials such as Talking Books for learners with blindness and low vision, a subject-specific terminological dictionary in Indian Sign Language, and learning materials in video format in Indian Sign Language for deaf and hard of hearing learners. These are available on YouTube channel of NIOS and Gyanamrit.

➤ NIOS is the first board in the country to offer ISL as a first language subject to deaf learners. The use of sign language as a subject (first language) will enable easy knowledge acquisition and comprehension.

➤ Provision of 'On-Demand Examinations' that give the learners a scope to appear in particular subjects' examinations as per their convenience.

➤ NIOS provides 'Examination at Home' that institutes exceptional case to case provision of conducting examinations at home for severely disabled learners. Such flexibility brings in reasonable exemptions during examinations that provide general and specific provisions for learners with a disability.

➤ In order to reach more DHH learners, NIOS utilises various media and ICT-enabled platforms to disseminate sign-language-based content. Apart from its sign language content on YouTube, NIOS offered broadcasting of ISL videos around the clock from October 2018 to August 2020 on its DTH (Direct to Home) channel 30 called Gyanamrit, which is part of the Swayam Prabha initiative for satellite-supported content broadcasting. This is the first educational channel in India to broadcast content in sign language at the secondary level.

➤ NIOS has also been engaged in providing live learning though its dedicated TV channel. One-hour live telecasts of ISL videos have been offered twice a week on PM e-Vidya channel 10 since September 2020 to increase awareness of

deaf culture and sign language across the country. This also provides the learners with an opportunity to directly interact and ask questions to clarify their doubts.

➤ NIOS has also developed a mechanism for a Virtual Open Schooling platform where learners can learn online while sitting at home and learning at their convenience. It provides opportunities for individuals whose geographical location or disabilities have prevented them from traveling to and participating in class discussions.

➤ NIOS has been organising the Arohan programme to leverage the potential of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) learners.

➤ NIOS has also been awarded the prestigious 'King Sejong Literacy Prize 2021' by UNESCO for its programme 'Enabling education of persons with disabilities through technology-enabled inclusive learning material, with a specific focus on Indian Sign Language (ISL) based content'.

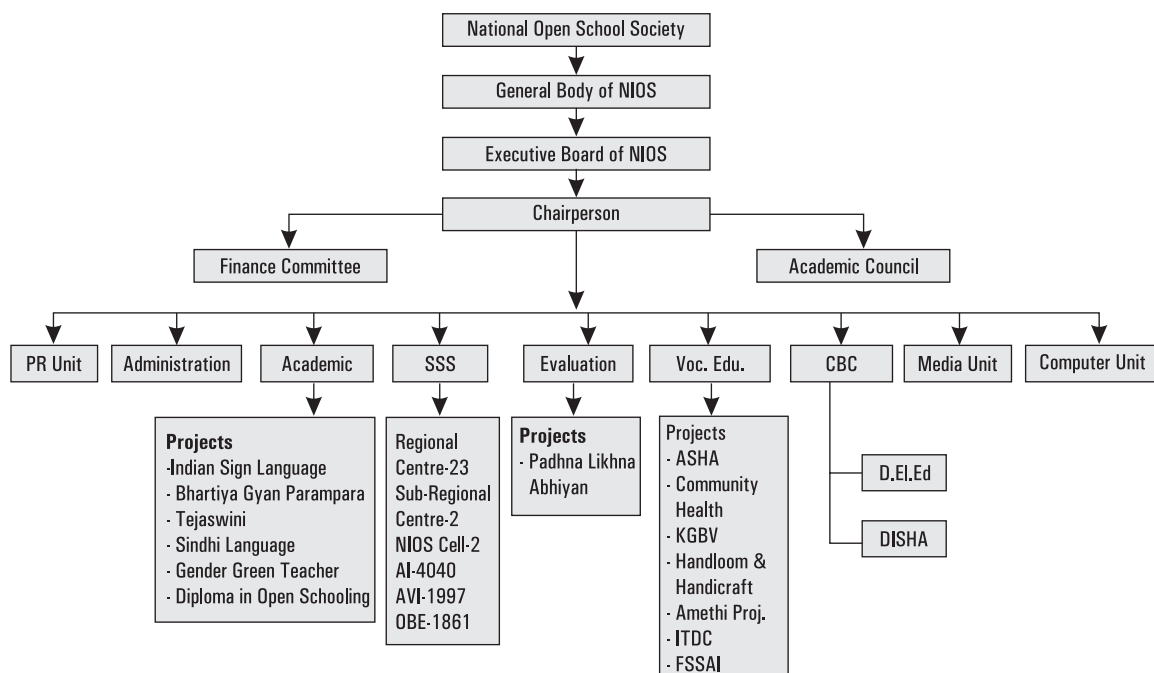# 4 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The policy is developed to guide and make learning processes inclusive and non-discriminatory, create an enabling environment free of bias and minimize barriers to education. The procedure followed for formulation of the policy is as under:

1. An understanding of policy development was established between NIOS and UN Women.

2. An approach paper was prepared for policy development.

3. A long list of experts was compiled, and finally, selected experts were approached to contribute to the policy formulation, discussion, and dialogue.

4. Regular meetings were organised with the experts to gain insight into Inclusion and respond to its needs through Open and Distance Learning.

5. Once themes were identified, experts were divided into working groups created to bring individual attention to specific themes. Various meetings were held with these groups, which included NIOS personnel, to understand existingresources within NIOS and then provide insight into enhancing the system to make it more inclusive.

6. During the discussions, a matrix was drafted and shared with all for updating and provide insights into all themes.

7. After detailed discussions, a draft document was prepared with the inputs of various experts and UNW and NIOS personnel.

8. Stakeholder consultations with study centres and learners of NIOS were planned. Various tools were developed for the same, including questionnaires. Few SAIED centres were visited and feedback collected from them. Various other centres and learners were approached for feedback during the preparation of the implementation plan.

9. Based on the inputs of various stakeholders, the policy was finalised.

THE SCOPE OF THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

This policy will guide NIOS, including all regional centres, accredited institutions, and vendors. It is anticipated that this will eventually extend to the State Open Schools and the learners' community. This will be achieved through close coordination with all NIOS study centres and personnel and partnerships with organisations working with learners on the ground on an everyday basis.

Organisational Structure of National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

National Open School Society

General Body of NIOS

Executive Board of NIOS

Chairperson

Finance Committee

Academic Council

PR Unit | Administration | Academic | SSS | Evaluation | Voc. Edu. | CBC | Media Unit | Computer Unit

Projects
-Indian Sign Language
- Bhartiya Gyan Parampara
- Tejaswini
- Sindhi Language
- Gender Green Teacher
- Diploma in Open Schooling

Regional Centre-23
Sub-Regional Centre-2
NIOS Cell-2
AI-4040
AVI-1997
OBE-1861

Projects
- Padhna Likhna Abhiyan

Projects
- ASHA
- Community Health
- KGBV
- Handloom & Handicraft
- Amethi Proj.
- ITDC
- FSSAI

D.El.Ed

DISHA

Source: NIOS Administration Department, July, 2021

1. Accessibility, Curriculum and Pedagogy

According to NEP 2020, the GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for Grades 6-8 was 90.9%, while for Grades 9-10 and 11-12, it was only 79.3% and 56.5%, respectively - indicating that a significant proportion of enrolled students drop out after Grade 5 and especially after Grade 8. As per the 75th round household survey by NSSO in 2017-18, the number of out of school children in the age group of 6 to 17 years is 3.22 crore. Considering the larger aim of inclusive education, NIOS can take lead to educate students in this scenario. It has seen continuously imparting education at open basic, secondary and senior secondary levels.

The policy strongly believes that education is essential for every one and various government and non-government agencies are working to achieve this objective. Access is one of the challenges in front of these agencies. NIOS has great strength to contribute in achieving this objective. Education in rural India is relatively low in comparison to urban India due to distance from schools, low relevance of curriculum and systemic gaps. It is a fact that the number of NIOS centres are not enough. There are very few institutions fully dedicated for learners with disabilities which is serious concern. It has also been observed that learners face difficulty in producing certificates of disability, caste etc at the time of admission. For girls, this is even more difficult due to huge socio-cultural stigma that a disability brings to her family. Largely families prefer to stay silent about their daughter's disability than making efforts for her disability certification. This hinders the process of their participation. Certification is important but not at the cost of participation in the learning process. Alongside this transgender and gender non-confirming persons face additional barriers in education.

It has been observed that enrolment alone does not ensure completion of education. Learners are pushed out of education due to various reasons, and sufficient database is not available to track these learners.

There are related challenges of accessibility of quality content to all. Despite the fact that academicians are sensitive to the needs of children who belong to diverse contexts and have special needs, there is a significant requirement of more rigorous steps in this direction so that no learner remains unattended.

Curriculum and study material of various classes must cater to the need of their developmental level and age. Curriculum must be latest, advanced and need based, which also strengthens the nation. The learning gap between enrolment from one class to the next needs to be bridged.

There is also an imminent need to revisit the role of teacher education programmes in light of inclusion and distance education.

The above context has created the need of presenting recommendations regarding access in two over arching domains. These are:

a.   Access (Infrastructure), Retention and Tracking of Learners

b.   Curriculum and Teaching-learning Material and Pedagogy

Recommendations

1a. Access (Infrastructure), Retention and Tracking of Learners

1a.i   After careful analysis of existing facilities and opportunities available to NIOS, it emerged that the potential learners, especially in rural India are not able to access education due to lack of awareness. To address this concern, it is envisioned and recommended that strong and effective advocacy mechanisms need to be established at/for different levels, particularly rural India.

1a.ii   Critical Educational Zone - zones that have higher number of students from the targeted group (such as educationally backward block with high dropout rate and out of school children, transgender, migrants, sex-workers, orphan homes, dependents of the Leprosy cured person) are recommended to be identified and advocacy progammes to be organised in the form of awareness camps, and use media such as TV, Radio, posters etc. Along with this the role of local bodies need to be envisioned for this purpose such as panchayat, post office, community centre, volunteer organisations and so on. This networking should be organised in a way which strengthen the accessibility of education to the maximum learners in an inclusive manner. Towards this, NIOS is recommended to have a formal plan for engaging with organisations working for People with Disabilities and other marginalised groups

encouraging these potential learners to access open learning system if not registered in regular schools. NIOS should also provide information about centers that are accessible in terms of enabling infrastructure on their website. It should be a continuous process. This entire process could be seen as 'The National Campaign for Enrolment with NIOS' (NCEN). This partnership approach will also facilitate achieving Goal 17 of the SDG 2030 (also highlighted by the NITI Aayog recently).

1a.iii Research shows that girls have been deprived from education due to institutional, social and personal reasons. Special attention need to be given on girls' education via advocacy so that maximum enrolment can be ensured. The transgender persons have also been away from education so focus should also be on their education.

1a.iv There is a need to ensure successful completion of education for all learners. A tracking mechanism should be developed to maintain track of all enrolled learners. Technology can be leveraged to ensure this is done. A special unit of NIOS must prepare and maintain a detailed profile of each learner with disability so that every single child can be monitored and facilitated. This will help in providing appropriate support to learners with special needs (LWSN).

1a.v Geographically, India is a big country and therefore many more study centres need to be developed for making education accessible and available for all. There is a strong need for establishing new centres with no compromise on accessibility and quality. There should be focus of looking at technology enabled learning infrastructure and qualified human resource. Government aid/funds should also be leveraged to open new study centres particularly in rural areas. Outreach should be undertaken to accredit more institutions.

1a.vi Considering the importance of education for all, it is recommended that 15% of the study centres should be dedicated for girls, learner with disability and minorities at elementary, secondary and senior secondary levels.

1a.vii Accepting the fact that all students must be attended by NIOS equally, it is recommended that more convergence needs to be done with individuals/students, organisations/institutions dealing with students with disability as these has been the most marginalized among the SEDGs This convergence may be established via orientation workshops, collateral contracts, collaboration with different kinds of associations, NGOs, other public institutions etc. Along with new collaborations, existing institutions already

associated with NIOS should be invited for meetings, workshops, seminars and other innovative practices. This will help in bridging the gap between NIOS and associated institutions and agencies

1a.viii It is suggested that a flexible approach be followed for the requirement of certificate of disability by NIOS to avail the facilities available for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). No student should be deprived from education just because s/he is not able to produce a certificate. Knowing the fact that procuring a disability certificate is a tedious task at present, and more difficult for females living in remote areas, it is also recommended that the process of getting a disability certificate must be made manageable by a person with disability without unwanted hurdles, and a reasonable time should be allotted to produce the certificate post enrolment. Similar policy may also be adopted for other minority groups who are expected to submit a certificate such as SC/ST and others as per the norms.

1b. Curriculum and Teaching-learning Material and Pedagogy

1b.i Accessibility, approachability and availability of education cannot be achieved unless students are provided with quality and usable learning material. Learning material must be sensitive to and represent the needs of various students such as children with disabilities, children from minorities, girl students, sexual minorities etc. Efforts should be made to make material available in all possible accessible formats and languages as per the requirement of the learner.

1b.ii Curriculum of NIOS must focus on learning outcomes, flexibility to adapt suitable and specific needs of learners, especially learners with disability and those who are socially and economically marginalised. It is also important to ensure minimum level of attainment and for that it is important to follow local language to the largest extent, and also make available appropriate communication and ICT aids and tools.

1b.iii Course content in Indian Sign Language (ISL) needs to be developed at elementary, secondary and senior secondary levels. Various disabilities and other marginalized learners must also be considered while developing the courses and course materials. Assessment procedures should also be simultaneously addressed along with material development.

1b.iv Course material in ISL should be developed for STEM courses as well. As per NEP 2020, all the learners should be able to access all subjects of their choice (Chapter 4 of NEP 2020).

1b.v NIOS must strengthen and initiate new courses/paper on skill development in various spheres. Along with this, focus should also be given to sports, cultural and creative activities and a barrier-free learning environment.

1b.vi A special unit could be established at NIOS to facilitate peer learning, chat groups, learning rooms (virtual and physical), consultation forums, career counselling and alumni interaction, for strengthening the peer learning practices.

1b.vii NIOS should develop bridge programmes for learners who drop out and take re-admission after a time interval. It is advised that these bridge progammes should be developed at two levels, first before the admission in class 10th and second before taking admission into class 12th. These courses will facilitate students to bridge the gap in education from their last certificate. Such courses should not be of more than 10 weeks duration.

1b.viii NIOS should focus on developing a blend of online and offline courses.

1b.ix The process of providing learning materials to learners should be made efficient. Multidisciplinary resource teams at nodal centres can be given responsibility to provide easy and accessible assistance, intervention wherever required related to learning materials and pedagogical support.

1b.x Local bodies, NIOS vans, volunteer supports can be considered systematically for the dissemination of learning materials. The prime objective of these units will be to make learning materials accessible to all even in the furthest locations.

1b.xi Incorporating the components of inclusive education should be essential for all teacher education progammes. NIOS should aim to allocate/raise funds to conduct various kinds of research studies to see the effectiveness of its system at various levels. These researches will strengthen the associability, availability, approachability and quality of education provided by NIOS to all marginalised learners.

2. Assessment

Assessment processes are aimed at collating essential information about the attainment of learning outcomes by an individual learner. Thus, in an inclusive set-up the assessment needs to be planned to address the multiple ways of learning and expression. The standardized test and measurement procedures might not be suitable for learners with diverse needs. It is therefore, expected that the process of assessment will be learner friendly. It needs to be aligned with the curriculum as mentioned in the preceding section on accessibility. This would benefit all children even those without any apparent special need.

With this policy document, the student population matrix enrolled with NIOS is bound to evolve. The assessment schedules are expected to address this diversity among learners.

One-time single mode examination may no longer be an appropriate mechanism. NIOS already has an in-built flexibility with reference to number of years required to successfully complete a specific school grade-level as also the mandatory number of subjects to be taken in a single attempt. This implies that unlike the regular school, students can take more than one academic year in successfully completing a grade level and they can also take examination in few subjects each time. The provision of holding examination two times a year and on-demand examinations are significant pro-learner practices being followed by NIOS.

The situation, however, is expected to change once the system decides to expand its scope. The two primary focus points/themes of the organisation need specific consideration here:

➤ The segment of primary and upper-primary education will now get intensively included in the system of NIOS.

➤ There will be focused provisions to provide educational opportunities to people from disadvantaged backgrounds including persons with specific educational needs.

Both these necessitate that the process of assessment becomes continuous and comprehensive. The multiple modes of assessment will also become imperative. The most basic concerns would be:

➤ To design an assessment process which spreads over a period with small tasks being provided regularly instead of a single examination.

➤ The multiple modes of assessment need to be incorporated at the systemic level, so that the needs of learners with diverse learning and expression styles are addressed.

Therefore, NIOS needs to develop innovative assessment and evaluation techniques to suit the needs of each of the learners across all levels.

Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that periodic assessment schedules be prepared for qualifying each of the grade level.

2.2 The cumulative assessment record be prepared which can represent the level of learning over a period of time.

2.3 The assessment be planned in accordance to the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes may be further divided into list of indicators arranged in ascending order of difficulty and step-wise achievement be documented for each learning outcome.

2.4 Learner centric multiple modes of assessment and variety of questions be designed for each step of assessment. The stand alone focus on paper-pencil test needs to be reviewed. The assessment matrix should emerge around multiple forms of expression and assistive devices as per the learners' choice.

2.5 The question paper needs to be developed in accessible language format for example, Indian Sign Language for learners with hearing impairment. Question papers needs to be designed looking at the inclusivity aspects and language needs of learners.

2.6 There should be different types of questions in the assessment sheet. This refers to the form of question.

2.7 The capacity building workshop for the teachers should include specific sessions on continuous and comprehensive assessment, the significance of multiple modes of assessment, the process of designing assessment-based activities/assignments/question papers and the process of evaluating responses.

2.8 The provision of special educator being a part of assessment procedure, especially for person with disability should be established.

2.9   The scope of digi-lockers being used by NIOS needs to be extended. Adding a specific segment of credit-bank will facilitate the learner to review and plan.

2.10   Elaborate guidelines for specific accommodations needed during assessment for persons with special needs should be prepared and shared with all the stakeholders including learners and their family members.

2.11   The evaluators should provide specific qualitative assessment to facilitate the process of locating gaps in learning. For this purpose guidelines along with a checklist of suggestive remarks may be prepared.

3. Technology

Leveraging technology is an important factor to enable learning and for inclusion of learners especially from disadvantaged backgrounds and creating an engaging learning environment. The existing digital platforms and ongoing ICT-based educational initiatives must be optimised and expanded to meet the current and future challenges in providing quality education for all.

NIOS in its Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode is catering to a variety of the learners' needs. The technology is used not only as a tool but for a variety of activities to integrate and promote experiential learning. NIOS has many initiatives to provide inclusive learning environment to all enrolled learners, but there is still scope to upgrade and use technologies to meet the needs of all learners and bridge the gap at different levels of teaching learning process.

Recommendations

3.1   To address gap of digital divide due to lack of devices, power and/ or internet connectivity, NIOS should collaborate with networks like Postal department, Gram Panchayats, NGOs and such other networks that help learners access digital learning mechanism of NIOS.

3.2   Establishing more support centres with the help of local human resources and internet connectivity especially in the rural and remote areas to provide latest information about admission, courses, online classes, and examination during the learning journey of the learner.

3.3   Setting up a centralised digital bank for all the learning materials in different format including Indian Sign Language video, Talking books and ePub format, at NIOS head quarter, regional centre and study centre, so that the same can be available for the learners as per their needs.

3.4 To promote the experiential and participative learning use of virtual online platform, live TV and YouTube and radio programme should be encouraged. It will help the learners self paced learning with the option for live interaction with the experts and peers to solve their queries.

3.5 Online learners support cell with IVRS, Video Chat facility and accessible web portal should be developed and updated time to time.

3.6 Need based technologies should be allowed in examination and assessment especially for learners with disability i.e. voice recorder, video recorder, scanner, ocr, speech to text software etc.

3.7 Secure Online Digital repository to store certificates of learners should be developed/maintained. It will help learners to access and share and store their credentials any-where and any-time in a safe and secure manner.

3.8 The existing technological intervention may be examined in light of inclusivity and based on the review, the technological intervention may be updated. Whenever any technological intervention are implemented, the sensitivity towards gender and inclusion need to be addressed.

4. Networking and Capacity Building

This policy envisions a more versatile profile of stakeholders engaging with NIOS in times to come. This may primarily be ascribed to two main emerging prepositions. One, the expanding vision of NIOS and two, the growing search for alternatives to regular school system.

The regular school system is under constant vigilance for its appropriateness for individual learner. The system is finding it challenging to personalised learning in its given structure. There is a consistent shift from regular schools to alternate schools and also home schooling. However, many of these are limited to elementary classes only due to need of recognized certification at secondary and senior secondary level. With its growing reach, NIOS can offer an authentic platform to many such aspirants.

As proposed through this policy, the expected presence of NIOS centres across all regions in the country will thus, create a spectrum of stakeholders who will be associated with the processes in different roles.

1. Administration focusing upon admission, resource centres and advocacy

2. Student facilitators including teachers, special educators, counsellors

3. Technical support personnel

4. Curriculum and assessment Planners

5. Family and community

Although it will be difficult to separate the role of one from other, yet a focused attention for capacity building of each of these stakeholders will ensure optimization of resources and opportunities. It is expected that the learning ecosystem at NIOS will include forums that enable learning from experts as well as from community peers.

Recommendations

4.1 To support the various roles of the administration, mobile vans as offices should be started for providing various facilities at doorstep. This will address the issue of access and retention for learners from SEDGs as also the learners with special needs.

4.2 The local administrative bodies like Aganwadi, Gram Panchayat or municipal corporations need to be engaged for advocacy and motivating the communities/families/individuals for enrolment and continued engagement with the process of formal education.

4.3 It is recommended that the local youth and community adults should be engaged in community sensitization. They could also develop library or book banks. They can initiate peer tutoring to enhance the quality of learning experiences. NIOS can recognise their contribution by issuing a certificate of appreciation for voluntary participation.

4.4 To address the issue of outreach, the creative team at NIOS should prepare materials depicting key features of NIOS with an emphasis on flexibility, quality learning materials in multiple representations, certification which is recognised at the global level and many more. This would encourage learners to comprehend the possibility of accomplishing formal education as per individual circumstances.

4.5 The local administrative office whether permanent or mobile should be fully capacitated. The personnel should be trained to recognise the specific needs of the learners and provide support accordingly. They must also be able to explain the various pathways to access study materials and multiple provisions or accommodations for assessment.

4.6   The resource centres need to be developed. Local schools may be roped in for this purpose. Other local facilities also need to be identified and mutually reinforcing networks should be created.

4.7   The teacher's orientation and capacity building workshops to be conducted at regular intervals. These could be teachers, who are working in local schools or those who are appointed by the NIOS. A collective pool of available resources needs to be generated.

4.8   This policy is proposed with a purpose of developing quality learning experiences for learners from SEDGs and persons with special educational needs at pan India level. It is strongly recommended that each NIOS centre may appoint special educator and counsellor.

4.9   In some locations the language spoken at home may be different from the language used in textbooks and other learning materials. Local resources must be engaged for addressing this language barrier with a systematic approach.

4.10   It is recommended that the training cum sensitization workshops for parents and other community members be organised as a regular practice.

4.11   The focal population may not have adequate resources as also the proficiency to access the online procedures and learning materials. The resource/local NIOS centres need to thus have competent technical support staff. The government has developed service support centres in all places. These centres may be approached for helping students access learning materials in multiple forms as per the special need.

4.12   It is recommended that a team of curriculum and assessment planners must be created. This team must be aware of on-site resources, so that the materials and assessment procedures may be designed accordingly. A systemic networking of various experts will be needed to create a dynamic forum for this purpose.

4.13   The family needs to be sensitized about the purpose of education as addressing need for quality of life and financial independence.

4.14   The community must be engaged to enhance the image of NIOS as a platform for gaining quality learning experience along with certification.

4.15   It is recommended that NIOS will establish links with other support systems (example - Skills Council for Persons with Disabilities and other Sector Skill Councils) that will provide the learners more options for joining capacity building.

4.16   It is recommended that NIOS will provide information about skill development centers that are accessible to PWD on its website. A collaboration with MSDE and the Skills Council for Persons with Disabilities could be considered.

4.17   NIOS will develop materials relating with career counselling, jobs (Government and Private sector) and training options for Persons with Disabilities. They will also design processes for dissemination of these materials.

4.18   NIOS will create effective platforms for sharing evidence based good practices among various professionals associated with the organisation. This will facilitate the process of upgrading the professional competence on a regular basis.

4.19   It is strongly recommended that NIOS will focus upon developing research wing for inclusive education. It will continuously examine the field realities and will strengthen its processes to reach each learner across India.

4.20   Enhancing outreach of NIOS by identifying and reaching out to schools associated with Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, MSDE, MWCD and through the Ministry of Education especially.

7 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A. Bodies for Implementation

For successful interventions and towards addressing the educational needs of various SEDGs and persons with disabilities, NIOS needs to set up an Inclusive Education Cell. This cell whould have faculty members and staff who have expertise and experience of working in the area of social inclusion, gender and disabilities and other prioritiesed groups.

A high level committee, namely, Committee for Assuring Accessible and Sustainable Education (CAASE) needs to be constituted to see the monitoring and implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy. The CAASE will have the representation of different departments of NIOS. To ensure an external point of view, the committee will have representation from expert(s) belonging to reputed National/International Organisations and other concerned bodies on inclusion and social justice.

CAASE will have following sub-committees:

1. Academic (looking at materials, pedagogy, assessment)

2. Counselling and Guidance

3. Budgeting and auditing committee to ensure inclusion and gender sensitiveness in creating awareness on inclusion for all stakeholders.

A short-term and long-term action plan based on this policy needs to be developed after policy comes into effect.

B. Reporting

1. A bi-annual reporting structure will be created and followed. Qualitative and quantitative information will be collected from the nodel persons concerned with each task as required and stated in the Plan of Action.

2. A reporting format will be prepared by CAASE based on indicators of success for each objective.

3. A format for evaluation based on parameters of success will be prepared by the IC against which the submitted reports will be evaluated.

4. Constructive feedback will be provided by CAASE to the concerned departments, personnel, with regard to achieving the policy goals.

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