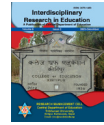




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Future Policy Direction of Special/Inclusive Education in Nepal

Rabindra Shiwakoti

Rabindra.shiwakoti@cded.tu.edu.np

Central Department of Education, TU, Kirtipur

Keywords

Dimension, policy theory, challenges, implementation, special education

Abstract

This study critically analyzed the future policy direction of special/inclusive education in Nepal. Using qualitative data collected through document analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions. This study is based on the premises of qualitative research design under the interpretative paradigm followed by critical interpretive design to analyze and interpret the field data. For this, 15 (fifteen) policy experts from Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Department of Education, university professors, and 11 head teachers from 6 special and 5 integrated schools, and special education council members and members of disabled related organizations were purposively selected as the informants.

The establishment of the Disability Right Commission at central level would be much effective for the overall development of special/inclusive education in Nepal. It has also been found that establishment of the special/inclusive education council secretariat would contribute to further expansion of special/inclusive education service in Nepal. Development of a provincial level master plan for special/inclusive education training for stakeholders has been strongly recommended for the overall development of special education in the country. The study also suggested that future policy development and its practice is to be based on research-based evidence. It also recommended for establishment of at least one special education center and one model school in each province, and at least one support center at each local level.

This study implies that a coherent policy-making is required through the consultation with the relevant stakeholders from the central, provincial, and local level in such a way that there is minimum gap in the power sharing among agencies at different levels of governance. Finally, this study suggests for developing future policies that support establishment of residential schools, individual education plan, transitional planning and individualized family service plans to enhance the promotion of disability sector in Nepal.

Introduction

The modern education system of Nepal was started in the 1950s. Since then, the Government of Nepal has reviewed and reformed the educational system of the country by forming different educational commissions from time to time in Nepal. In the series of the educational commission, Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (NNEPC, 1956) was the first and the most important education commission in the context of Nepal. The NNEPC has suggested the Government of Nepal ensure universal and free primary education. The commission has further recommended that primary education should be made free and compulsory along with infrastructure development and supply of teachers in schools (Ministry of Education, 1956). After ten years, All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) was formed in 1966. This commission suggested the enactment of the Education Act in order to supply sufficient legal support to the emerging national education system. Nepal adopted National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971 which was the first systematic endeavor to formulate education policy in Nepal. The plan suggested establishing a Special Education Council as an apex body for running special education program. This Plan basically accepted the accountability and responsibility of the state in special education.

As a result, the Special Education Council (1973) was established with the chairmanship of the education minister. The council had taken a total responsibility of Special Education in Nepal. In this context, it was later developed to providing the concept of education to the disabled children and also making them survived in society. In this context, the Rotary Club had sent a person to the USA for one-month teacher training. After returning to Nepal, he established a school

for the blind children in Lalitpur district of Nepal. Unfortunately, the school soon closed (Research Centre for Educational Innovation & Development, 2004) due to the reason of financial problem. Similarly, Isabel Grant, a blind American woman visited Nepal. She had requested the related persons about disabilities to run the integrated class for the blind children.

After that, teachers of Laboratory School and student teachers of the College of Education were provided teacher training in relation to the teaching with children with visual impairment in 1994. In the same year, a few blind children were admitted to the Laboratory School and since then the integrated education program was started. In the year 1996, the school for the deaf students was established in Bal Mandir, Naxal in Kathmandu. Mr. Khagendra Basnet who himself physically disabled, took initiation and successfully established the Nepal Blind and Disabled Association in Nepal. The association had advocated for special education in Nepal, and was able to establish Nirmal Child Development Centre in 1980 for mentally disabled children. In 1977, the Government of Nepal established Social Welfare National Coordination Council (SWNCC) for supporting the children with disabilities.

All the programs of special education were started to run under the Social Welfare National Coordination Council. Due to the initiation of this platform, the Special Education Policy (1996) came into effect in Nepal. The policy has classified disabilities into seven categories with clear definition of each. In addition, this policy also categorized schools into two types as integrated and special schools avail special education to the children with disabilities. Royal Commission on Higher Education

was formed in 1981 to evaluate the higher education system of Nepal. Furthermore, after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, the Government of Nepal formed the National Education Commission (NEC) in 1992. NEC mandated to review the current education system and suggested changes to address the demands of people in the changed context (Ministry of Education, 1992). The commission identified caste and gender disparities in education and suggested special provisions for physically and mentally disabled people.

The commission also recommended the initiation of appropriate steps for educating the handicapped children to the highest level, provision of special education for the disabled children and orphans as well as an expansion of education in geographically disadvantaged areas (Ministry of Education, 1992). Basically, the recommendations of different educational commissions focused on designing and implementing strategic interventions to increase the access and participation of the citizens in education. The report of HLNEC (1998) recommended for the establishment of disability friendly special education of children with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 1998). The Non-Formal Education Policy (2006) has arranged the special provisions of special as well as inclusive education. This policy embarked on arrangement of special education especially for the lower class, conflict-affected, disabled, and marginalized population. This concern has been well stated at Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015) as right to education (Nepal Law Commission, 2015).

The results of ensuring education as the human right were the contribution made by the UN convention on the rights of the children (1989); UN standard rules (1993),

Salamanca conference (1994), Jomtien declaration (1990) and Dakar framework for action (2000). The national special education policies were the results of postulates and provisions set by the international community for Education for All (EFA). Nepal also endorsed these international policies and took these provisions as guidelines to set its policies, programs, and projects for ensuring educational opportunities for all children including children with disabilities (Department of Education, 2015). Most importantly, like an international ideological shift on educational discourse, the discourse of special need education was initially started in Nepal. Despite number of efforts, the existing situation of special education in Nepal has not improved as an intended manner to ensure access and quality education of children with special needs.

In Nepal, it is estimated that approximately 2 percent (1.94%) of population are disabled (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). But there are only 380-resource classes for the blind, deaf with hard of hearing, and intellectual disability, 32 special schools, and 22 integrated schools are operated to educate the disabled children (Ministry of Education, 2017) across the country. About 3.4 percent of children are still out of school, with no access even to the primary education (Ministry of Education, 2015). It shows that development of a conducive environment for special education in Nepal is still challenging. Moreover, 5.6% of teachers at the basic level and 12.2% of teachers at the secondary level are still untrained (Department of Education, 2014). The Government of Nepal has been investing a big amount of its annual budget for formulating, implementing, and assessing the policy in general education and special education for children with disability. Currently, in Nepal, there are 13 schools for intellectual disability; 13 schools for deaf,

1 school for physically handicapped and 1 school for blind students. The children with mild and moderate types of disabilities are easy to adjust in the integrated classroom and they can succeed to get an education with the special care from the teachers at school and parents at home. The children with severe and profound level of disability need additional special supports and care as per the intensity of their disability and need specific provisions for their education; special schools, special curriculum, and special teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Nepal Government has been formulating different educational policies by targeting the quality education of all children including children with disabilities for five decades. Different revisions in formulated policies have been made to improve their remaining deficiencies. According to Thapa (2012), the government promotes an inclusive education policy to provide education to all sorts of children without discrimination but the children with disability have not got complete support they need, and many schools are unprepared to teach these children. Similarly, in the country, a large number of disabled children are out of school; some of them are in segregated homes, and; rest of all are in regular schools studying with normal children but our regular schools do not have disabled-friendly environment to address diversity (Human Rights Watch, 2011). For example, the schools do not have the disabled-friendly infrastructure and supportive teaching materials (Shrestha, 2017).

Studies have also shown the fact that, in Nepal, special children get enrolled in the ECD and in basic level classes in mainstream schools but only a few numbers of children complete their school education (Department of Education, 2016). Above mentioned

situation has raised many more queries in relation to the formulation of policies with the purpose of ensuring the right to education of all children as well as children with disabilities in particular. In this context, a few major representative questions are: What steps need to be followed to make special educational policy more effective? What are the best ways to future policy direction for Nepal? This study, therefore, was based on exploring these policy-related questions.

From these situations, the researcher has chosen this concern as a research problem. Besides that, improvement on special education policies and practices is the collective responsibility of the government, its line agencies, and the community. After the Education for All (EFA) 1990, special needs students have been learning in the regular classroom with other students, but the progress has still been very slow. It is reported that there is an inflexible curriculum, lack of needy support and less appropriate teaching and testing methods in regular schools (Shrestha, 2017). This research also identifies the attitudes of the stakeholders and their views towards the current policy. By reflecting on those ideas, the realistic and more practical results of this study will ultimately be fruitful for the total improvement of the current special education policies and its implication in Nepal.

Methodology

This study is based on the premises of the qualitative research design under the interpretative paradigm. In this regard, the study followed a critical interpretive design or approach to analyze and interpret the field data. In this study, the respondents are selected from the rural and urban settings by using the purposive sampling method based on access and convenience to the school.

The purpose was to examine future policy direction of special/inclusive education. The key informants were the policy experts from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Department of Education, and universities. In this context, fifteen policy experts were selected from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Department of Education, and university professors for an in-depth interview. Besides

that, Special Education Council member's representative from the National Federation of Disabled Nepal, Blind Association of Nepal was also taken as informants in the study. Furthermore, head teachers of both special and integrated were also taken as other informants. The details of informants are presented in the table III-1 below.

< Table III-1> Lists of Informants

Districts	Schools		Informants	Number of informants
	Special	Integrated		
Kathmandu	3	2	Head Teachers	5
Bhaktapur	2	1	Head Teachers	3
Lalitpur	1	2	Head Teachers	3
Organizations			Policy experts (including Special Education Council members)	5
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology				
Department of Education			Policy experts (including Special Education Council members)	5
National Federation of the Disabled- Nepal			Special Education Council members	2
Blind Association of Nepal			Special Education Council members	2
University professors			Policy experts (including Special Education Council members)	5

connecting them with the policy theory. While the researcher started to analyze the field information, the researcher tried to understand and generate the themes. In doing so, the researcher reorganized and rearranged the collected information.

At the same time, the data were arranged into a matrix making it easy to retrieve and to see relationships among the data for developing

the themes. The results of the study were directly achieved from the analysis of the raw data which was obtained from the field, not from priori models. In this regard, the principal mode of analysis has generated the themes from the raw data or done by the development of categories. The thematic categories were generated from multiple readings of the collected raw data. The results of the study depend on the information

In this study, the researcher used document analysis, interview protocols, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guideline to exploring the future policy direction of special/inclusive education in Nepal. In this context, the researcher reviewed documents in relation to the special education policy in Nepal. After reviewing these documents, they served as the basic source of information about design, activities, and processes, and they gave ideas about important questions to pursue through more direct observations and interviewing (Patton, 1990; & Punch, 2005). Similarly, the diverse interview protocols were used for policy experts from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and Department of Education, and university professors to collect information related to future policy direction of Nepal. Focus group discussion (FGD) guidelines were arranged to carry out discussion with the special education council members who are representing from National Federation of Disabled Nepal, and Blind Association of Nepal to get required information about the future direction for Nepal.

For data collection purpose, the researcher visited the sampled organizations and schools as an uninvited guest. At first, the researcher has tried to earn trust and establish a good relationship with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and Department of Education staff, including the special education council members. Similarly, the researcher tried to earn trust and establish a rapport with university professors, National Federation of Disabled-Nepal members, Blind Association Members, and head teachers of both special and integrated schools. The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with the policy experts who were from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Department of Education, and Universities. The gathered data were analyzed and interpreted thematically

collected about the future policy direction for Nepal. Every activity of the research work was undertaken in common natural setting and their relation was analyzed through both primary and secondary data.

Results and Discussion

The Education Act (1971) which was known as a new education formulated through the initiation of the National Education System Plan (NESP) made a provision of special education. The Special Education Council (SEC) was established in 1973 and this council was provided with the overall authority of special education in the country so that it took the total responsibility of special education in Nepal. Furthermore, the Government of Nepal introduced Special Education Policy for the first time in 1996. This policy was formulated on the recommendation of the National Education Commission (NEC, 1992). This special education policy incorporated only seven categories of disability, and also lacked a specific schedule of implementation.

The Incheon Strategy (2012) stated to make the real right for the person with disability in Asia and Pacific region covering ten goals for promoting inclusive education for disabled children. The current Inclusive Education Policy (2017) was formulated incorporating the spirit of Incheon Declaration. This policy incorporated the global trends of inclusive education in developing countries like Nepal in particular. It consisted of many more new provisions to ensure the educational rights of disabled children and put forward the idea of inclusive education through special education. Unfortunately, this inclusive education policy has unable to encompass the various types of disability with broad categorization.

The future policy had better to make separate master plan in provincial level

In this context, state-level policy would be appropriate for the extension and promotion of special/inclusive education in Nepal. Furthermore, it would be better if a separate master plan of special/inclusive education for the effective development of special/ inclusive education in provincial level was prepared. The current special/inclusive education policy for disabled people in Nepal addresses the global assumptions and postulates of inclusive education in the context of Nepal. The government of Nepal legally as well as formally accepted the inclusive education system and made inclusive education for people with disability to preserve the rights to education of children with disability in the context of Nepal.

Two ways model of education until the management of disabled friendly infrastructure

The Special Education Policy (2017) accepted the two-way philosophical provision as special and integrated education in the country. Until the construction of disability-friendly infrastructure, it would be better to conduct both in inclusive education in special and integrated mechanisms. In this regard, we are not able to go in full inclusion in the current situation. There must be an arrangement of the provision of special education for the children with deaf and hard of hearing problems under inclusive education. The authority of preparing policy implementation guidelines should be provided for the local level government for the effective implementation of the policies in the country. The monitoring and evaluation responsibility for the special/ inclusive education would be better to provide the local government in our country.

The future policy based on research, evidence, and practice

The future policy would be research and practice-based and it has a provision of reform mechanism on the demands and needs of contemporary society. Education policy implementation must be conceptualized as a social practice that takes place upon a social terrain. The social theory seeks to explain how and why we do what we do on social terrain (Honing, 2006). There must be evidence-based policy and practices at the time of policy formulation, this provision helped to formulate the implementable policy in our context. Finally, the future policy direction of Nepal has better to incorporate the pathways suggested through comprehensive research and practice-based evidence. The policy needs to have incorporated the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Transitional Planning, Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), and encompassed the Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy to enhance the promotion of disability sector.

Establish at least one Special Education Centre and One Model School in each province of Nepal

At least a Special Education Centre in each of the seven provinces should be established. If possible, it is better to prepare a master plan at the state level for the overall development of special/inclusive education in Nepal. The researcher has taken an interview with the policy experts from the ministry of education, department of education, members of disability-related organization, and members of special/inclusive education council. During the interview, one of the policy experts from the Department of Education under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology said,

A total of 75% budget from the central level, 10% budget from state level and 15%

budget from local level should be managed for effective implementation of Inclusive Education Policy (2017). The government must make a provision of the green job to the disabled students who have graduated from special and integrated schools in the context of Nepal (Policy Expert-F from organization-B).

The above budgetary allocation provision is appropriate in the context of our country. There must be a provision of managing 75% budget from the central level, 10% budget from state level and 15% budget from local level for effective implementation of the current policy. Hence, the government of Nepal must establish at least one Special Education Centre and Model School in each province of our country. The current policy also intended to establish at least one school for one kind of disability in the context of Nepal.

Establish Special/Inclusive Education Council Secretariat Office for increase the working efficiency

Furthermore, the Special/Inclusive Education Council secretariat office must be established for the effective implementation of the decision made by the council. The Special/Inclusive Education Council Secretariat Office must be accountable and responsible for the development and promotion of special education in Nepal. Besides that, there are not enough professionals and para-professionals working in the field of disability for the promotion of special/inclusive education in Nepal. So, it is better to take the responsibility of special education by the central government until the required human resource in provincial and local levels are managed.

Provide Special/inclusive education training for stakeholders

Special/inclusive education training must be provided to the resource persons and head teachers of the resource centers to promote the special/inclusive education. It can be noticed that there are debates about the governance of special education by the central government, state government, and local government. At the time of interview, the majority of the respondents reported that there is a lack of human resource especially in the case of intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities in our context. So, each level of government has given more emphasis on human resource development for the effective development of special/inclusive education. Human resource development is the crucial issues for the long-term sustainability of the development of special/inclusive education in Nepal.

Establish the Special Education Support Center in local level

It would be better to establish the Special Education Support Centre for effective development of special/inclusive education at the local level on the basis of their local needs and demands. At least One Model School in one local body should be established based on the nature of disabilities. Besides that, it would be also better to establish the Special Education Support Centre (SESC) for effective development of special/inclusive education at the local level as their local needs and demands. The researcher has conducted the focus group discussion with head teachers and members of disability related organization. During the focus group discussion, the majority of head teachers opined that at least One Model School in each of the local body must be established based on the nature and types of disabilities.

Establish the Disability Right Commission (DRC) in Central level

It would be better if the Disability Right Commission (DRC) at the central level for the promotion of service to the disabilities sector in the country. The researcher had taken an in-depth interview with the policy experts. During the interview, policy experts opined that Disability Right Commission (DRC) in central level is to be established for the promotion of service to the disabilities sector in the country. In this connection, Elmore (1990) foresaw much of this tension and excitement when he discussed the effects of school restructuring. He discussed three themes of our future policy in education: empowerment. Furthermore, the policy needs to incorporate the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Transitional Planning, and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) encompassed the Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy to enhance the promotion of disability sector in our context. Hence, policy needs to be revised and have to be included in the modern special education provision in details and insert newly established modern provisions of special educational strategies as well inclusive education in the context of Nepal.

Conclusion

The government of Nepal has failed to prepare the special/inclusive education policy on the basis of research, evidence, and practice. It was found that state and local governments are reluctant to take the implementation responsibility and accountability to extend the special education in Nepal. It was concluded that the future policy of Nepal had better formulate with consideration of the research based, evidence, and practice-based mechanism. It would be better if at least one Model Special Education Centre is established in each province of the country for the overall development of special education in the state. Similarly, it was also recommended for the

establishment of Special Education Support Centre at each local level.

Finally, the policy needs to incorporate the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Transitional Planning, and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to enhance the promotion of disability sector. The current policy needs to encompass the Response to Intervention (RTI) strategy, and home school collaboration. Similarly, it also requires getting continuous support for the use of modern assistive devices in the instructional process. In connection to the above discussion, the Government should take immediate initiation to incorporate the above-mentioned provisions in Special/Inclusive Education Master Plan (2019-2023) which is going to be approved and implemented in the future. There are many weaknesses prevailed in the existing Inclusive Education Policy (2017). Hence, the policy demands many reforms in the existing provisions so that the policy needs to be revised.

Implications

The first basic level implications of the policy are that we have to conduct the discussion sessions among the stakeholders of special education and then reach to the conclusion, whether the special/inclusive education policy is appropriate for implementation or not. The provision of both special and integrated modality of schooling must be accepted until full inclusive phase is reached through the construction of disability-friendly infrastructure. The disabled-friendly Model Special School should be established in each district for severe and profound types of disability for ensuring their right to education. This policy still needs to be evaluated and revised addressing the national and international emerging trends across the globe for addressing national, international

developmental trends and values of special education. The government should take initiation to establish the Institution of Special Education (ISE) in province level and Special Education Support Centre at each local level.

Finally, there should be provision of Residential Schools, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Transitional Planning, and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) in the policy to enhance the promotion of special education sector in our context. The current policy needs to encompass the Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies, home school collaboration, and continuous support for using modern assistive devices in the instructional process. In connection to the above discussion, the Government of Nepal should take initiation to incorporate such provisions in Special/Inclusive Education Master Plan (2019-2023).

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