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### **Policy Implementation Challenges of Special/Inclusive Education in Nepal**

Rabindra Shiwakoti

Tribhuvan University

#### **Author Note**

Dr. Rabindra Shiwakoti is an Associate Professor of Foundations of Education at the Central Department of Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He is a teacher and research guide to M.Ed., M.Phil, and Ph.D. students at Tribhuvan University. He has participated in several national and international seminars and conferences on educational and social issues. He contributes to General Education, Special Needs Education, and Inclusive Education policy for the National Planning Commission, Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. He also serves as a Subject Committee member of Tribhuvan University and Pokhara University, a Faculty Board member of Purbanchal University, and Secretary of the Center for Educational Research and Social Development (CERSOD).

Correspondence to this article should be addressed to Rabindra Siwakoti, Tribhuvan University. Email: [rabindra.siwakoti@cded.tu.edu.np](mailto:rabindra.siwakoti@cded.tu.edu.np)

### Abstract

This study critically analyzed Nepal's policy implementation challenges of special/inclusive education. 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 the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Department of Education, university professors, and 11 (eleven) headteachers from 6 (six) special and 5 (five) integrated schools, and special education council members and members of disabled related organizations were purposively selected as the informants. Furthermore, inadequate human resources, lack of necessary budgetary provision, and low level of awareness are the major challenges of special education in Nepal. There is a lack of a separate special education policy in the foundation period, and the responsibility and authority of relevant stakeholders are not explicitly stated. At the practice level, the researcher found a gap in the inductive action plans for implementation across the central, provincial, and local levels of government of Nepal. It was also found that there was no coordination among the Ministry of Education and other line ministries for the implementation of existing policy and provisions. This study implies that coherent policy-making is required through consultation with the relevant stakeholders from the central, provincial, and local levels so that there is a minimum gap in power-sharing among agencies at different levels of governance. Such attempts will ease the implementation of macro policies into the micro contexts.

*Keywords:* dimension, policy theory, challenges, implementation, special education, Nepal

**Policy Implementation Challenges of Special/Inclusive Education in Nepal**

The modern education system of Nepal started in the 1950s. 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 that the Government of Nepal ensure universal and free primary education (Ministry of Education, 1956). After ten years, the All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) was formed in 1966. This commission opened the straight discussion of special education by including specialized teaching for crippled, blind, deaf, and dumb. The commission's report suggested providing training and certification to entrust these trained people with the responsibility of working with children with disability (Kafle, 2002). Nepal adopted National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971 as another previous plan has categorically described the role of the government in the extension of special education in the country by recognizing both need and importance.

In this context, NESP 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 programs under the Ministry of Education and Culture. This Plan accepted the accountability and responsibility of the state in special education and was established Special Education Council (1973) under the chairmanship of the Education Minister. The council had taken total responsibility for Special Education in Nepal. In this context, it was later developed to provide education to disabled children and make them survive in society. The Rotary Club had sent a person to the USA for one-month teacher training. After returning to Nepal, he established a school for blind children in the Lalitpur district of Nepal. Unfortunately, the school soon closed (Research Centre for Educational Innovation & Development, 2004) because of the 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 teaching 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 has been started. In the year 1996, the school for deaf students was established in Bal Mandir, Naxal in Kathmandu. Mr. Khagendra Basnet, who is 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) to support children with disabilities. All the special education programs 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.

Furthermore, after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, the Government of Nepal formed the National Education Commission (NEC) in 1992. NEC was mandated to review the current education system and suggested changes to address people's demands 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. Similarly, High-Level National Education Commission (HLNEC) was formed in 1998, and it advocated for ensuring the effective implementation of recommendations of the previous commissions. The report of HLNEC (1998) recommended the establishment of disability-friendly special education for children with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The Non-Formal Education Policy (2006) has arranged the special provisions for special as well as inclusive education. The policy primarily focuses on implementing inclusive education by ensuring the access and quality of education through the non-formal education system. This concern has been well stated in Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015) as a right to education. This article also ensured compulsory basic education and free education up to the secondary level and ensured education for the economically marginalized people (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The results of ensuring education as a human right were the contribution made by the United Nations Convention on the rights of the children (1989); United Nations standard rules (1993), the Salamanca conference (1994), the 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).

The Government of Nepal has changed the current focus from policy to practice and has emphasized quality education by mainstreaming those marginalized and those in need of special education. In Nepal, it is estimated that approximately 2 percent (1.94%) of the population are disabled (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). There are only 380-resource classes for the blind, deaf with hard of hearing, and intellectual disability. Thirty-two special schools and 22 integrated schools are operated to educate disabled children (Ministry of Education, 2017) across the country. Currently, in Nepal, there are 13 schools for intellectual disabilities, 13 schools for the deaf, one school for the physically disabled, and one school for blind students. Most importantly, like a global ideological shift in educational discourse, the discourse of special needs education was initially started in Nepal. Despite several efforts, the existing situation of special education in Nepal has not improved in an intended manner to ensure access to and quality education for children with special needs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Government of Nepal has been formulating different educational policies by targeting the quality education of all children, including children with disabilities, for five decades. The Government of Nepal has been formulating various policies and plans (National Education System Plan –1971, Education Act-1971, Special Education Policy-1996, Special Education Operation Guidelines-2004, Inclusive Education Policy for Disabled People-2017) for a long time, but large numbers of children do not have access to basic education yet. 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 the complete support they need, and many schools are unprepared to teach these children.

Similarly, in the country, a large number of children with disabilities are out of school; some of them are in segregated homes, and; the rest of all are in regular schools studying with normal children, but our regular schools do not have a disabled-friendly environment to address diversity (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The schools do not have the disabled-friendly infrastructure and supporting teaching materials (Shrestha, 2017). In this context, a few major representative questions are: Do the policies work in favor of the person with disabilities, disadvantaged, and marginalized groups? Does the policy structure represent the needs and problems of persons with disabilities? Are the formulated policies implemented in an intended manner? What steps need to be followed to make special educational policy more effective? This study, therefore, was based on exploring these policy-related questions, and it also advocated the necessity of the study in the context of developing countries, especially in the case of Nepal.

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. The researcher has chosen this concern as a research problem from these

situations. Since this research explores the current challenges of special education policies and draws implications for further improvement, it is important to dig out the challenges of special education and the gaps in the policies and their implementation in real situations. This research also identifies the stakeholders' attitudes and their views toward the current policy. By reflecting on those ideas, this study's realistic and more practical results 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. The data was mostly gathered through the qualitative research tools, and analysis and interpretation of the study are made on the basis of the theories and the understandings obtained through sociocultural and educational contexts. 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. Similarly, eleven headteachers of special and integrated schools of Kathmandu valley and four education council members were selected for focus group discussion. In this study, the schools are selected from rural and urban settings using the purposive sampling method based on access and convenience to the school taken as a study sample. In this study, the key informants were the policy experts from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, the Department of Education, and universities. The details of the informants are presented in table 1 below.

**Table 1***List 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	5
Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology			Special Education Council members)	
Department of Education			Policy experts (including	5
			Special Education Council members)	
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	5
			Special Education Council members)	

In this study, the researcher used document analysis, interview protocols, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guidelines to explore policy implementation challenges of special/inclusive education in Nepal. The researcher directly collected the materials and reviewed them for a basic source of information. 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, policy experts from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the Department of Education used diverse, in-depth interview protocols to collect information related to policy implementation challenges of special/inclusive education in Nepal. The researcher consulted and discussed with policy experts and headteachers and developed interview guidelines. The researcher also conducted pilot testing of interview guidelines with some policy experts for the reliability and validity of the contents. Focus group discussion (FGD) guidelines were arranged to carry out discussions with the special education council members representing the National Federation of Disabled Nepal and Blind Association of Nepal to get the required information about the policy implementation challenges of special/inclusive education in Nepal. At the time of FGD, the researcher has provided the open opportunity to the informants for their independent opinions without any biases.

For data collection, the researcher visited the sampled organizations and schools as an uninvited guest to earn trust and establish a good relationship with the informants. After collecting the data, the gathered data were analyzed and interpreted thematically, connecting them with the policy theory. In this regard, the principal mode of analysis has generated the themes from the raw data or done by developing categories. According to the research objectives, the general thematic categories were deduced. The thematic categories were generated from multiple readings of the collected raw data. The results of the study depend on the information collected about the policy implementation challenges of special education/inclusive education in Nepal. Every activity of the research work was undertaken in a common natural setting, and their relation was analyzed through both primary and secondary data.

### **Results and Discussion**

Education policy implementation is a field of investigation and put into practice for decades has amounted to a type of national look for the development of

special education policies. Education has become a big budget and also high-stakes policy arena in developing countries like Nepal. Education orders or commands a lion's allocation of state and local budgets to levels that ask for hard queries about education policies' feasibility and supplementary value. The realities of schooling in different communities countrywide recommend that those paying attention to improving the quality of education policy implementation should focus not simply on what conditions if any, different education policies get implemented and work. Following are the policy implementation challenges of special/inclusive education in the context of Nepal.

### **Inadequate Human Resources for the Promotion and Development of Special Education**

Nepal has no trained and resourceful human resources to conduct the identification of disability classification. The Government of Nepal has been unable to classify the proper types of disabilities due to the absence of appropriate tools. In this context, the researcher took an in-depth interview with the policy experts from Tribhuvan University. One of the policy experts from Tribhuvan University said:

I am not satisfied with the policies implementation before 1996 in the country. The special education council failed to reform the existing special education policy and was unable to prepare the concrete implementation guidelines for effective policy implementation. The budgetary allocation in the special education sector was the main challenge in relation to the policy implementation in the country.

From the above explanation, the real policy experts who are frequently involved in policy formulation are not satisfied with budgetary allocation and policy implementation. They are not convinced about the duties and responsibilities of the Special Education Council.

**Lack of Necessary Budgetary Provision and Low Level of Awareness in the Special Education Sector**

The lack of a necessary budget for special education is the main challenge in formulating the appropriate policy and its implementation in our country. The government of Nepal has allocated the national budget for education under 20 percent of the total budget. So the special education budget seems inadequate for effective policy implementation in an intended manner. The previous government has failed to allocate adequate budgetary amounts to the special education sector of Nepal. The lack of adequate budget in the special education sector and low awareness of educating children with a disability created big challenges in implementing special education in Nepal.

**Lack of Separate Special Education Policy in the Foundation Period**

Special Education Council 1973 was the supreme body for formulating policies, guidelines, and implementation strategies in the country. There was no separate special education policy during the foundation period, but some provisions for special education were made in the Education Act 1971. The Special Education Policy 1996 is the first formal legal policy document in the special education sector in Nepal. This policy has been in place for more than twenty years in the history of special education in Nepal. In this context, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview, majority of the policy experts opined that the implementation aspect of this policy was satisfactory, but some of the stakeholders reported that there was a small gap between the policy document and its implementation in the country.

**Political Instability Creates a Transitional Situation in Special Education Sector**

The political instability created uncertainty in policy formation, reform, and implementation. The political structural stability has also created barriers to good policy design and full implementation. Due to the effects of political structural stability, the government of Nepal failed to address the global assumptions and

postulates signed at the governmental level. This issue remains a major challenge in special education in Nepal. In addition, the policy could cover only a small chunk of the disability sector. The formulated special education policy has helped increase the awareness and access of disabled children and empowered Nepalese society. The implementation of this policy also established the trend of admitting disabled children into the school system.

### **Lack of Necessary Coordination Between the Ministry of Education and Other Line Ministries**

The major challenge of this policy was its failure to establish the coordination between the Ministry of Education and other line ministries (Ministry of Federal Affairs, Ministry of Woman, Children and Senior Citizen, and Ministry of Health, etc.) who were working in the areas of welfare for the disabled people. The stakeholders failed to make effective coordination for policy formulation and its implementation. The researcher has conducted FGD with the Special Education Council members and headteachers of special and integrated schools in the sample districts. One of the headteachers of special school from Bhaktapur district said:

This policy helps to bear the salary of 278 teachers and 150 non-teaching staff from the special school of Nepal. This contribution from Special Education Council was the milestone for the extension and promotion of Special education in Nepal. The implementation of the Special Education Policy (1996) was completely based on the right based approach in the special education sector.

The government of Nepal is still focusing on the basic needs of the Nepalese people and spending their capacity to increase the living standard of people. However, some strategies were not successfully implemented as intended because of the lack of good coordination between the Ministry of Education and other line Ministries which were related to the welfare of disabled people.

### **Lack of Clarity on the Responsibility and Authority of Stakeholders**

Nepal has just introduced the federal concept, but there is no clear-cut provision for allocating the distribution of authority to three levels of government in Nepal. Currently, Nepal's state and local governments are still waiting for the policy decision from the central government. It seems that the stakeholders are confused about taking the authority to implement this policy in the full phase. The budgetary issues are also raised to implement this policy. In this context, the researcher conducted the focus group discussion with the special education council members from disabled-related organizations and headteachers of special and integrated schools. One of the renewed special education council members of a disability-related organization said:

The state and local governments have tried to escape from their responsibility and accountability to extend the special education in Nepal. There is no clear-cut implementation guideline for provincial and local government in our context. Even though, implementation of this policy is in the initial phase, it is better to wait for its outputs and results.

Common ownership for the implementation of existing special education policy at all those levels of government should be developed. The state and local level government should take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the special education programs.

### **Inclusive Education Policy 2017 not Addressing the Philosophy of Full Inclusion**

Finally, the existing Inclusive Education Policy 2017 incorporated the values of social justice, equity, and inclusiveness, as indicated in the Salamanca Conference (1994). The policy has caught the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Right of a Person with Disability (2006) in the line of special education policy formulation in Nepal. Indeed, the policy has been a push factor for shifting towards inclusive education from special education. In this regard, it would be better if inclusive

education could be run through special and integrated mechanisms until the construction of disability-friendly infrastructure. When we have the availability of disabled-friendly infrastructure, then it can be run either way. In this context, we are not able to go into full inclusion in the current situation without arranging the provision of special education for children with deaf and hard of hearing.

### **Conclusion**

Before 1996, the council worked as an apex body for policy formulation and policy implementation for the development of special education in Nepal. The special education policy 1996 was no specific policy implementation schedule but made a provision for special schools, integrated schools, and resource classes. The policy was partly successful in addressing the dimension of policy theory. However, the political instability caused a transitional situation in policy formulation and failed to prepare clear-cut guidelines for effective policy implementation in the country. The efforts made for the real development of special education were not adequate to provide access and quality of special/inclusive education to disabled people. Due to a lack of necessary budgetary provision, the policy failed to implement the policies and programs of special education in the context of Nepal. The policy failed to establish the coordination between the Ministry of Education and other line ministries (Ministry of Federal Affairs, Ministry of Woman, Children and Senior Citizen, and Ministry of Health, etc.) working on welfare for disabled people. The current inclusive education policy has its details action plan for its implementation in its document. However, it was found that state and local governments are reluctant to take the implementation responsibility and accountability to extend special education in Nepal.

### **Implications**

The central government should draft a clear-cut policy and course of action to keep away from the overlap of power-sharing among different agencies to implement the special education programs in the school. The first basic level implications of the

policy are that we have to conduct the discussion sessions among the special education stakeholders and then reach a conclusion on whether the special/inclusive education policy is appropriate for implementation. The central government should be responsible for policy-making, and the provincial government should be responsible for materials production and curriculum formulation. Likewise, the local level body should be responsible for policy implementation and monitoring and evaluating the programs related to special/inclusive education in the country.

Indeed, we have to increase access to reach the goals of full inclusion by arranging disabled-friendly infrastructure and environment. There should be research, evidence, and practice-based policy reform mechanisms and a policy evaluation and review system. The central government should take responsibility for special education until adequate human resources at the provincial and local levels are developed. The government must initiate establishing Disability Right Commission (DRC) at the central level to develop disabled-friendly infrastructure to reach the destination of full inclusion. Finally, there should be a provision for Residential Schools, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Transitional Planning, and an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) in the policy to enhance the promotion of the 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.

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