

Policies and Regulatory Frameworks Governing Special Pre-Service Teacher Education Programme

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Abstract-- Special pre-service teacher education is an essential for preparing skilled educators capable of addressing the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. The effectiveness of such programs depends largely on well-structured policies and regulatory frameworks that ensure quality, accountability, and inclusivity. Teachers play a decisive role in translating inclusive policies into classroom practices. Special pre-service teacher education refers to professional training provided to prospective teachers before they enter the teaching profession, enabling them to work effectively with children having special educational needs. This paper examines the major policies, legal provisions, and regulatory bodies governing special pre-service teacher education in India. It also highlights curriculum standards, practicum requirements, challenges, and future directions for strengthening teacher preparation.

Keywords-- Special Education, Pre-Service Teacher Education Programme

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is a fundamental human right and inclusive education has emerged as a global priority. Policies and regulatory frameworks governing special pre-service teacher education are grounded in the principles of inclusive education, human rights, and social justice, which emphasize equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities. International instruments such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) mandate that teacher education systems prepare future teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to address learner diversity. At the national level, these commitments are translated into legislation and policy directives such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (Government of India, 2016) and the National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2020) which require pre-service teacher education programmes to integrate inclusive pedagogy, special education competencies, and practical exposure to diverse learning needs.

Regulatory bodies like the National Council for Teacher Education and the Rehabilitation Council of India further operationalize these policies by setting standards for curriculum, accreditation, and professional competencies, thereby ensuring alignment between policy intent and teacher preparation practices (NCTE, 2009; RCI, 1992). Teacher education advocates counter that positive core relations exist between teacher certification status and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000; Felter, 1999; Laczko-Kerr 2002). In India, the growing emphasis on inclusive education and disability rights has increased the demand for qualified special educators. To maintain quality and uniformity in teacher preparation, several policies and regulatory frameworks have been developed. This paper analyzes these frameworks and their role in shaping special pre-service teacher education.

II. CONCEPT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education refers to a range of educational services, programs, and instructional practices designed to meet the unique learning needs of students with disabilities. It is based on the principle that all learners, regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, sensory, or learning differences, have the right to access appropriate and meaningful education. Special education involves the use of individualized instructional strategies, adapted curricula, specialized materials, and supportive services to help learners achieve their maximum potential (Friend & Bursuck, 2019).

Special education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in classrooms, homes, hospitals, and other settings (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004). This instruction is typically guided by an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which outlines specific goals, accommodations, and services tailored to the learner. From an international perspective, special education aligns with the broader goal of inclusive education, which emphasizes removing barriers to learning and ensuring equitable participation for all students.

UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that special education supports diversity in learning by addressing individual differences and promoting participation, achievement, and well-being for learners with disabilities within inclusive systems.

III. CONCEPT OF SPECIAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Special Teacher Education Program refers to a structured professional preparation program designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies required to educate learners with diverse disabilities and special educational needs. It emphasizes understanding individual differences and adapting curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students (Friend & Bursuck, 2019).



(Source: <https://encryptedtbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSSJekHBEaq>)

Special teacher education programs also focus on developing positive attitudes toward diversity and disability. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a rights-based and learner-centered approach, recognizing disability not merely as a limitation but as a form of human diversity. Ethical practices, advocacy, and respect for the dignity of learners with special needs are integral components of teacher preparation (Florian, 2014). Overall the concept of a special teacher education program is centered on preparing competent, reflective, and compassionate educators who can ensure meaningful learning opportunities for students with special needs and contribute to building an inclusive education system.

IV. CONCEPT OF SPECIAL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Special Pre-Service Teacher Education Program is designed to prepare future educators with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively teach students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, and exceptional talents.

The primary goal of such a program is to ensure that teachers are equipped to provide inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education in a variety of learning environments. SPSTEP integrates both theoretical foundations and practical experiences in special education, focusing on areas such as developmental psychology, instructional strategies, assistive technologies, classroom management, and individualized education planning (IEP) (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). This program emphasizes early exposure to inclusive teaching practices during pre-service training. Trainees engage in simulated and real classroom experiences under the guidance of experienced mentors, allowing them to develop competencies in differentiating instruction, assessing diverse learning needs, and implementing evidence-based interventions. A critical component of the program is fostering reflective practice, encouraging pre-service teachers to critically analyse their teaching strategies, classroom interactions, and attitudes toward students with disabilities.

Special pre-service teacher education encompasses academic and professional training that prepares future teachers to work with children having physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, or learning disabilities.

Special pre-service teacher education program focuses on developing competencies related to:

- Understanding various disabilities
- Applying inclusive and individualized teaching strategies
- Using assistive and educational technologies
- Collaborating with parents and professionals

These programs differ from general teacher education due to their specialized nature and regulatory requirements.

V. NEED FOR POLICIES AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

Policies and regulations are essential to:

- Ensure standardization of teacher education programs
- Maintain professional competence and ethics
- Protect the educational rights of children with disabilities
- Promote inclusive and equitable education

Without regulatory oversight, teacher preparation may lack quality and consistency.

VI. POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING SPECIAL PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA



a) National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The NEP 2020 serves as the primary national policy framework shaping teacher education in India including special and inclusive education training.

- *Teacher Education Reform:* NEP 2020 mandates systemic reform of teacher education, moving toward high quality, multidisciplinary, integrated programmes (e.g., four-year integrated B.Ed.) and ensuring all teachers training meets competence, inclusion, and professional standards. These reforms apply to general and special educator preparation.
- *Inclusive and Special Education:* NEP 2020 explicitly recognises the need for special educators who understand both subject pedagogy and disability specific requirements and proposes their preparation through pre-service and in-service training modalities (certificate courses and specialisations).
- *Regulatory Standards Aligned with Inclusion:* The policy aligns teacher education curricula with inclusive practices, emphasising training for teachers to work in diverse classrooms and address special needs learners.

b) Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016

The RPwD Act is a legislative framework that shapes inclusive education and, by extension, teacher preparation:

- *Inclusive Education Guarantee:* Defined as education where students with and without disabilities learn together with adaptations to meet diverse needs.
- *Teacher Training Implication:* As per the RPwD Act mandates inclusive education frameworks in schooling which necessitate that pre-service teacher education includes capacity for inclusive practices and disability awareness.

c) National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

Statutory authority for pre-service teacher education:

- Established under the National Council for Teacher Education Act, 1993, NCTE is responsible for norms and standards, including those for special and inclusive teacher education.
- NCTE issues norms for teacher education programmes (e.g., B.Ed., B.El.Ed.) and guidelines for accessibility and inclusive practice in teacher training institutions.
- NCTE collaborates with RCI to incorporate disability inclusive practices into regular pre-service teacher education and ensure accessibility in teacher education institutions.

d) Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)

Statutory authority for special education:

- RCI was established as a statutory body to regulate training of professionals in disability rehabilitation and special education (under the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992).
- It prescribes standards, curriculum frameworks, and certification for special education courses (e.g., diploma/degree in special education). RCI registration is mandatory for special educators to practice.
- Special pre-service programmes (B.Ed. Spl.Ed., diploma in Spl.Ed.) are structured by RCI guidelines, including practice teaching opportunities and inclusive pedagogy components.

e) National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)

- NEP 2020 mandates the development of National Professional Standards for Teachers, which will inform the design and quality assurance of pre-service teacher education programmes, including inclusive practice competencies.

f) SamagraShikshaAbhiyan (SSA)

- While not specific to teacher education policy, SSA (part of the National Education Mission) includes Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education which supports pre-service and in-service teacher preparation including inclusive practices.

Key Elements of the Policy Framework

Sl.No.	Policy	Relevance to Special Pre-Service Teacher Education
1.	NEP 2020	Mandates integrated, high quality pre-service programmes & inclusive pedagogy training.
2.	RPwD Act, 2016	Legal basis for inclusion requiring teacher training to cover disability needs.
3.	NCTE	Sets norms for teacher education programme
4.	RCI	Defines standards and certification for special educators.
5.	NCFTE / RCI Frameworks	Guides teacher preparation including inclusive and disability teaching competencies.
6.	NPST	Informs programme design and competencies required.

VII. CURRICULUM AND TRAINING STANDARDS

Regulatory frameworks emphasize competency-based curricula that include:

- Foundations of special and inclusive education
- Disability-specific pedagogy
- Assessment and individualized education plans
- Assistive technology
- Teaching practice and internship

VIII. PRACTICUM AND INTERNSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Practical training is a mandatory component of pre-service teacher education. Teaching practice and school internships provide opportunities for student teachers to apply their knowledge in real classroom contexts. Regulatory guidelines require supervised field experiences, reflective practice, and systematic evaluation to ensure professional readiness.

IX. CONCLUSION

Policies and regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in shaping special pre-service teacher education. In India, NEP 2020, the RPwD Act, and regulatory bodies like NCTE and RCI provide a structured foundation for teacher preparation. Strengthening implementation, monitoring, and institutional capacity will enhance the quality of special education and promote inclusive schooling. By combining pedagogical knowledge with practical application special teacher education programme aims to produce educators who are not only skilled in curriculum adaptation and behavioural management but also advocates for inclusive education and lifelong learning. Ultimately the program addresses the global call for teachers capable of meeting the needs of all learners, promoting social justice and equal educational opportunities.

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