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Bridging Policy Intent and Classroom Realities: A Contextualised Indian Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy under NEP 2020

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Abstract

Despite the progressive vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a persistent disconnect continues to exist between policy intent and classroom realities in the implementation of inclusive education in India. While the policy advocates equitable, flexible, and learner-centered approaches, its translation into classroom practice remains inconsistent and fragmented, particularly within diverse and socio-culturally complex educational settings. Addressing this critical gap, the present conceptual paper proposes a Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy (C-IMIP), designed to operationalise inclusive education through structured, context-sensitive, and practice-oriented pedagogical strategies.

The proposed framework integrates five interrelated dimensions—multilingual pedagogy, socio-emotional inclusion, differentiated instruction, community participation, and assessment flexibility—grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), constructivist learning theory, and social inclusion theory. The model conceptualises inclusive pedagogy as a dynamic and interconnected process rather than a collection of isolated interventions. By contextualising global inclusive education frameworks within Indian educational realities, the study offers a comprehensive pedagogical approach for educators, teacher educators, policymakers, and institutions.

The paper contributes to the discourse on inclusive education by bridging the divide between policy aspirations and pedagogical practice while advancing a holistic and contextualised understanding of inclusion in Indian classrooms. The study further highlights the need for practice-oriented teacher education, systemic institutional support, and flexible pedagogical structures for the effective implementation of inclusive education under NEP 2020.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; National Education Policy 2020; Inclusive Pedagogy; Contextualised Pedagogical Framework; Differentiated Instruction; Multilingual

Pedagogy; Socio-Emotional Learning; Assessment Flexibility; Teacher Education; Policy–Practice Gap.

1. Introduction

The realisation of inclusive education in India depends not merely on progressive policy formulation but on its effective translation into classroom practice. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a transformative vision for equitable and inclusive education by emphasising access, participation, flexibility, and holistic development for all learners, including students from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). The policy advocates learner-centered pedagogical approaches, multilingualism, experiential learning, and inclusive educational practices that accommodate learner diversity.

However, despite these progressive aspirations, a persistent disconnect continues to exist between policy intent and classroom realities. Emerging studies indicate that inclusive education in India remains predominantly conceptual and policy-driven, with limited operationalisation at the classroom level (Rakshit & Yadav, 2025). Teachers frequently encounter challenges in addressing learner diversity due to inadequate pedagogical guidance, insufficient practical training, rigid curricular structures, and standardised assessment practices (Prasad et al., 2025). Consequently, inclusion often remains aspirational rather than meaningfully implemented.

The complexity of Indian classrooms further intensifies this challenge. Educational settings in India are characterised by linguistic plurality, socio-economic disparities, cultural diversity, varied cognitive abilities, and unequal access to educational resources. While NEP 2020 recognises these diversities and advocates flexibility and multilingualism, it provides limited classroom-level pedagogical frameworks to guide teachers in translating inclusive principles into practice (Kasinathan et al., 2023).

A major concern emerging from recent literature is the lack of contextualised pedagogical models capable of addressing

the unique realities of Indian classrooms. Existing global frameworks offer valuable conceptual insights but often fail to sufficiently account for India's socio-cultural complexity, infrastructural limitations, and systemic educational inequalities. As a result, teachers are frequently left to interpret inclusive education independently, leading to fragmented and inconsistent practices.

In this context, there is an urgent need for a structured, context-sensitive, and practice-oriented pedagogical framework capable of bridging the policy–practice divide. Such a framework must integrate instructional flexibility, socio-emotional dimensions, community participation, multilingual approaches, and equitable assessment practices into a coherent pedagogical system.

Addressing this need, the present conceptual paper proposes the **Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy (C-IMIP)**. The framework seeks to operationalise inclusive education under NEP 2020 through five interconnected dimensions: multilingual pedagogy, socio-emotional inclusion, differentiated instruction, community participation, and assessment flexibility. By synthesising global theoretical perspectives with Indian educational realities, the study contributes toward bridging the gap between policy aspirations and classroom implementation.

2. Research Gap and Significance of the Study

Although inclusive education has gained considerable policy attention in India following the introduction of NEP 2020, existing literature reveals several conceptual and practical gaps. Most contemporary studies focus either on policy analysis, teacher perceptions, or broad implementation challenges, with limited emphasis on structured pedagogical frameworks capable of translating policy principles into actionable classroom practices.

Current research indicates that teachers often possess conceptual awareness regarding inclusive education but lack practical pedagogical models for addressing learner diversity effectively (Rakshit & Yadav, 2025). Similarly, studies exploring inclusive practices frequently examine isolated dimensions such as differentiated instruction or multilingual education without integrating them into a holistic pedagogical framework.

Another significant gap lies in the contextual adaptation of global inclusive education models. Frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning and inclusive pedagogical approaches developed in Western educational contexts provide valuable theoretical insights; however, their direct application within Indian classrooms remains limited due to socio-cultural, linguistic, infrastructural, and systemic differences.

Furthermore, the socio-emotional and community dimensions of inclusion remain comparatively underexplored within Indian educational discourse. While inclusion is frequently discussed in terms of access and accommodation, less attention has been given to emotional belongingness, peer interaction, community participation, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The present study addresses these gaps by proposing a contextualised and multidimensional pedagogical framework specifically designed for Indian classrooms. The significance of the study lies in:

- Providing a structured pedagogical model for implementing inclusive education under NEP 2020
- Integrating pedagogical, socio-emotional, linguistic, and community dimensions into a unified framework
- Contextualising global theories of inclusion within Indian educational realities
- Contributing a practice-oriented conceptual model for teacher education and classroom implementation
- Bridging the policy–practice divide through actionable and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies

The proposed C-IMIP framework therefore contributes both theoretically and practically to the advancement of inclusive education discourse in India.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The proposed Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy (C-IMIP) is grounded in established theoretical perspectives that collectively inform inclusive educational practices. These frameworks provide a robust conceptual foundation for understanding learner diversity, designing flexible pedagogies, and fostering equitable participation within classrooms. The integration of these perspectives enables the model to move beyond prescriptive approaches toward a dynamic and context-responsive framework.

3.1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a comprehensive framework for addressing learner variability by advocating flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse needs from the outset (CAST, 2018). UDL is based on three core principles:

- Multiple means of engagement
- Multiple means of representation
- Multiple means of expression

These principles are particularly relevant in inclusive classrooms where learners differ in abilities, interests, linguistic backgrounds, and learning preferences.

Within the Indian educational context, UDL offers a critical alternative to traditional one-size-fits-all pedagogical approaches. It aligns strongly with NEP 2020, which advocates flexibility, accessibility, and learner-centered education (Shilpa & Sharma, 2025). In the proposed framework, UDL informs differentiated instruction and assessment flexibility, ensuring that teaching-learning processes become accessible and equitable for all learners.

3.2. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction, experience, collaboration, and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978). The theory emphasises the importance of social interaction, contextual learning, prior experiences, and active participation in shaping understanding.

In inclusive classrooms, constructivist approaches facilitate collaborative and experiential learning processes that support diverse learners irrespective of their individual differences. These approaches are particularly relevant to NEP 2020, which promotes inquiry-based learning, experiential pedagogy, and learner-centered teaching practices.

Within the C-IMIP framework, constructivist principles underpin socio-emotional inclusion and community participation by promoting collaborative learning, peer interaction, dialogic engagement, and contextualised educational experiences.

3.3. Social Inclusion Theory

Social inclusion theory focuses on ensuring equitable participation while removing systemic barriers that hinder individuals from engaging fully within educational and social contexts (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The theory extends beyond physical access and emphasises belongingness, participation, acceptance, and equity.

In the Indian educational context, where exclusion may arise from socio-economic disparities, language barriers, caste, disability, or cultural marginalisation, social inclusion theory offers a critical lens for understanding inclusive education.

The theory strongly aligns with the vision of NEP 2020, which advocates equitable and inclusive education for all learners, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. Within the proposed framework, social inclusion theory informs socio-emotional inclusion and community participation, recognising that inclusive education extends beyond classroom instruction to the broader socio-cultural ecosystem of the learner.

3.4. Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

While each theoretical perspective contributes distinct insights, their integration provides a more comprehensive foundation for inclusive pedagogy.

- UDL ensures structural flexibility in curriculum design and assessment
- Constructivism facilitates meaningful, collaborative, and experiential learning
- Social inclusion theory emphasises participation, equity, and belongingness

The C-IMIP framework synthesises these perspectives to create a multidimensional and context-sensitive model that addresses cognitive, emotional, linguistic, social, and contextual dimensions of learning.

This integrated theoretical foundation strengthens the practical applicability of the framework and supports the operationalisation of inclusive education within Indian classrooms.

4. Need for a Contextualised Indian Framework

Although global frameworks on inclusive education provide significant conceptual insights, their direct implementation within Indian classrooms remains limited due to the country's complex socio-cultural and educational diversity.

Recent literature indicates that inclusive education in India continues to remain largely policy-driven, with limited translation into meaningful classroom practices (Rakshit & Yadav, 2025). Teachers frequently encounter challenges related to learner diversity due to insufficient training, lack of practical pedagogical models, rigid curricula, infrastructural limitations, and standardised assessment systems (Prasad et al., 2025).

Indian classrooms are inherently heterogeneous and include diversity in:

- Language and communication patterns
- Socio-economic backgrounds
- Cultural and regional identities
- Cognitive abilities and learning styles
- Access to educational resources

While NEP 2020 advocates multilingualism, flexibility, inclusion, and holistic development, the absence of a coherent pedagogical framework results in fragmented implementation.

Another critical challenge lies in the limited integration of socio-emotional dimensions within inclusive education practices. Contemporary research increasingly emphasises the importance of empathy, emotional safety, belongingness, and peer interaction in fostering inclusive learning environments (Lugo et al., 2025). However, these dimensions remain underrepresented in classroom pedagogy.

Similarly, community participation—a crucial factor within the Indian socio-cultural context—has not been systematically integrated into existing pedagogical approaches. Inclusive education in India cannot be sustained solely within classroom spaces; it requires collaboration among schools, families, communities, and educational institutions.

These limitations underscore the urgent need for a contextualised and holistic pedagogical framework capable of bridging the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. The proposed C-IMIP framework addresses this need by integrating pedagogical flexibility, socio-emotional inclusion, multilingual practices, community engagement, and assessment reform into a unified model.

5. The C-IMIP Model: Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy

The Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy (C-IMIP) is proposed as an integrative framework designed to operationalise the inclusive vision of NEP 2020 within Indian classrooms.

Grounded in Universal Design for Learning, constructivist principles, and social inclusion theory, the model adopts a multidimensional approach that addresses cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and contextual dimensions of learning.

The framework consists of five interconnected components:

1. Multilingual Pedagogy
2. Socio-Emotional Inclusion
3. Differentiated Instruction
4. Community Participation
5. Assessment Flexibility

These components function as a dynamic and interconnected system rather than isolated dimensions, ensuring that inclusive pedagogy becomes embedded within classroom practices.

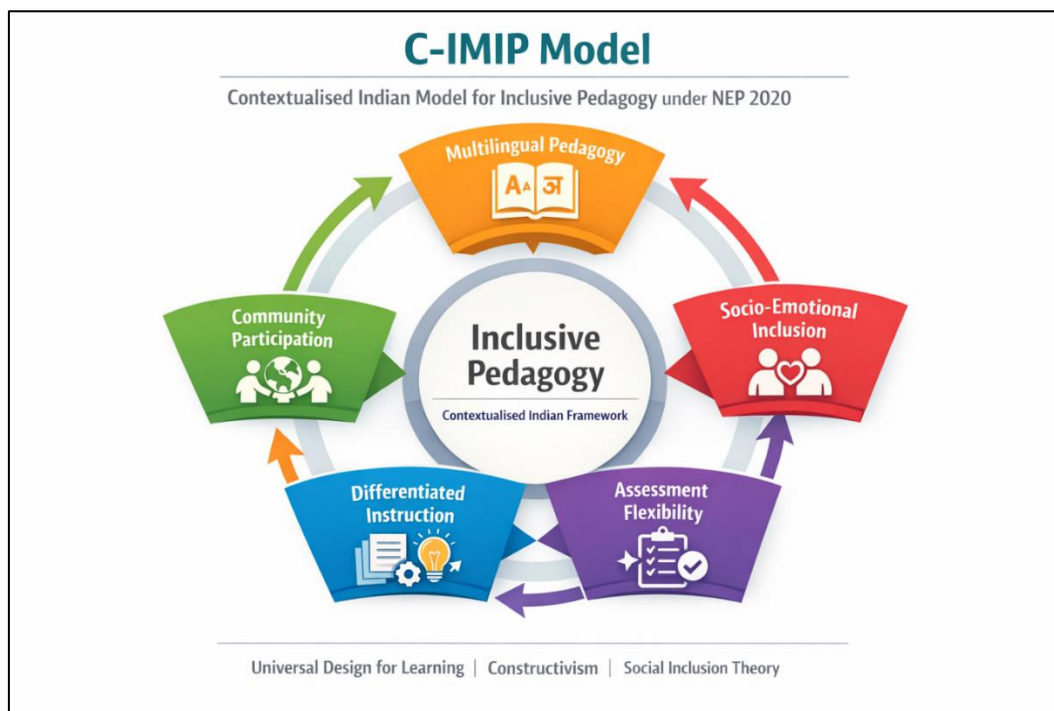


Figure 1: C-IMIP Model – A Contextualised Indian Framework for Inclusive Pedagogy under NEP 2020

5.1. Multilingual Pedagogy

Multilingual pedagogy forms a foundational dimension of the framework, reflecting the linguistic diversity of Indian classrooms and the emphasis on mother tongue-based education under NEP 2020.

Strategies include:

- Translanguaging practices
- Bilingual instructional resources
- Integration of local linguistic and cultural contexts
- Use of multilingual classroom communication

Multilingual pedagogy reduces cognitive barriers, enhances comprehension, and strengthens learner participation. It also promotes cultural inclusivity and learner confidence.

5.2. Socio-Emotional Inclusion

Socio-emotional inclusion addresses the affective dimension of learning by fostering supportive, empathetic, and emotionally safe classroom environments.

Strategies include:

- Reflective classroom dialogue
- Peer collaboration and support
- Activities promoting empathy and emotional expression
- Classroom practices encouraging belongingness and participation

This dimension ensures that learners not only participate academically but also experience emotional inclusion and psychological safety.

5.3. Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction focuses on adapting content, pedagogy, learning processes, and assessment according to learner needs and abilities.

Strategies include:

- Tiered assignments
- Flexible grouping
- Scaffolding techniques
- Use of assistive and digital technologies
- Adaptation of instructional materials

Aligned with UDL principles, differentiated instruction promotes equitable access to learning opportunities for all learners.

5.4. Community Participation

Community participation extends inclusive education beyond classroom spaces and recognises the importance of families, communities, and socio-cultural environments in supporting learner development.

Strategies include:

- Parent-teacher collaboration
- Community-based learning initiatives
- Awareness programmes on inclusion
- Inclusion-oriented school-community partnerships

This component strengthens holistic learner support and reinforces inclusive values within broader social contexts.

5.5. Assessment Flexibility

Assessment flexibility ensures equitable and meaningful evaluation processes that recognise learner diversity.

Strategies include:

- Portfolio-based assessment
- Formative assessment practices
- Multiple modes of learner expression
- Continuous feedback mechanisms
- Competency-based evaluation

Flexible assessment practices support holistic development and reduce exclusionary assessment barriers.

5.6. Integrative Nature of the Model

A major strength of the C-IMIP framework lies in its interconnected and dynamic structure.

- Multilingual pedagogy enhances socio-emotional inclusion
- Differentiated instruction supports equitable assessment
- Community participation strengthens contextual relevance
- Assessment flexibility reinforces learner confidence and participation

This multidimensional integration transforms inclusive pedagogy from isolated strategies into a systemic educational approach.

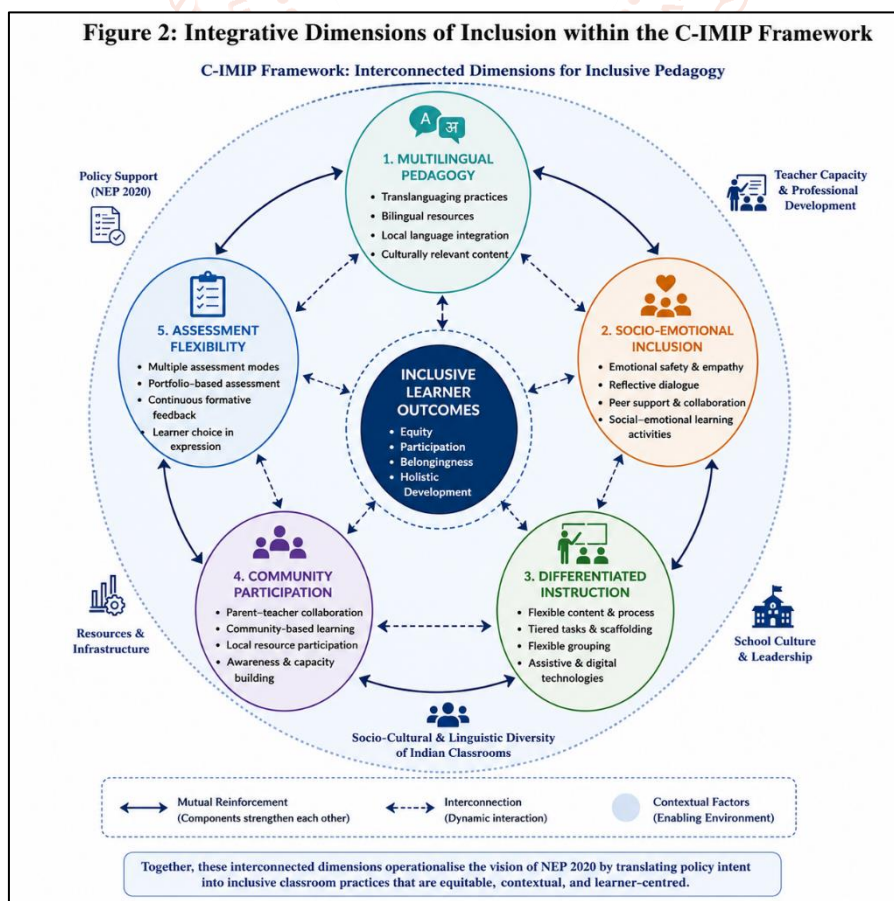


Figure 2: Integrative Dimensions of Inclusion within the C-IMIP Framework

6. Discussion

The present conceptual study addresses a critical gap in the implementation of inclusive education in India by proposing the C-IMIP framework as a contextualised and practice-oriented pedagogical model.

While NEP 2020 articulates a transformative vision for inclusive education, existing implementation efforts remain fragmented and inconsistent due to the absence of structured pedagogical frameworks (Rakshit & Yadav, 2025). The proposed model addresses this gap by integrating multilingual pedagogy, socio-emotional inclusion, differentiated instruction, community participation, and assessment flexibility into a cohesive system.

A significant contribution of the framework lies in its contextual adaptation to Indian educational realities. Unlike generic global models, the C-IMIP framework explicitly recognises the linguistic diversity, socio-economic disparities, infrastructural inequalities, and cultural heterogeneity characterising Indian classrooms.

The inclusion of multilingual pedagogy directly aligns with the policy emphasis on mother tongue-based education while enhancing accessibility and learner participation. Similarly, socio-emotional inclusion extends the understanding of inclusive education beyond academic accommodation to encompass emotional safety, empathy, and belongingness.

Differentiated instruction and flexible assessment practices align strongly with UDL principles and facilitate equitable learning opportunities for diverse learners. The integration of community participation further strengthens the framework by recognising the role of families and socio-cultural contexts in sustaining inclusive educational practices.

Importantly, the framework conceptualises inclusion as a dynamic and interconnected process rather than a set of isolated interventions. This systemic perspective addresses a major limitation of existing approaches that frequently treat inclusion as fragmented strategies rather than an integrated pedagogical philosophy.

The study therefore contributes toward bridging the divide between policy aspirations and classroom implementation by providing a practical and context-sensitive pedagogical framework for Indian education.

7. Implications

7.1. Implications for Classroom Practice

The C-IMIP framework offers practicing teachers a structured yet flexible model for implementing inclusive pedagogy.

By integrating multilingual strategies, socio-emotional practices, differentiated instruction, and flexible assessment methods, teachers can respond more effectively to learner diversity.

The framework encourages a shift from rigid teacher-centered approaches toward adaptive and learner-responsive pedagogies.

7.2. Implications for Teacher Education

The findings underscore the need to transform teacher education programmes by integrating practical and experiential training in inclusive pedagogy.

Pre-service and in-service teacher education should move beyond theoretical discussions and incorporate:

- Hands-on inclusive teaching practices
- Training in differentiated instruction
- Socio-emotional learning strategies
- Inclusive assessment design
- Community engagement practices

Embedding the C-IMIP framework within teacher education curricula can significantly enhance teacher preparedness for diverse classrooms.

7.3. Implications for Policy and Institutional Practice

At the policy level, the study highlights the importance of translating inclusive education policy into classroom-level pedagogical guidance.

Educational institutions and policymakers may utilise the C-IMIP framework for:

- Designing inclusive school policies
- Developing teacher professional development programmes
- Reforming assessment systems
- Strengthening school-community partnerships
- Supporting multilingual and learner-centered pedagogical reforms

7.4. Implications for Future Research

The present study is conceptual in nature and provides a foundation for empirical investigation.

Future research may:

- Empirically validate the C-IMIP framework
- Examine implementation across rural and urban educational settings
- Investigate the effectiveness of individual dimensions of the model
- Explore teacher perceptions and classroom outcomes associated with the framework

Empirical validation will further strengthen the applicability and scalability of the model within diverse Indian educational contexts.

8. Conclusion

The vision of inclusive education articulated in the National Education Policy 2020 necessitates a transition from theoretical discourse to meaningful classroom implementation.

The present study proposes the Contextualised Indian Model for Inclusive Pedagogy (C-IMIP) as a comprehensive and practice-oriented framework designed to bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom realities.

By integrating multilingual pedagogy, socio-emotional inclusion, differentiated instruction, community participation, and assessment flexibility, the framework addresses multiple dimensions of inclusion within Indian classrooms.

The study contributes to inclusive education discourse by contextualising global theoretical perspectives within

Indian educational realities while advancing a multidimensional understanding of inclusion.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of inclusive education requires not only progressive policies but also context-sensitive pedagogical frameworks, institutional support, and teacher preparedness. The proposed C-IMIP model therefore offers a meaningful step toward operationalising inclusive education in India and fostering equitable learning environments for all learners.

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