GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION & LITERACY

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.209
ANSWERED ON 27.11.2024

Digital Education Accessibility for Differently-abled Students

209 **Shri K.R. Suresh Reddy:**

Will the Minister of *Education* be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken by Government to ensure that digital education platforms are accessible to differently-abled students;
(b) the current status of the implementation of assistive technologies for online education in schools and colleges;
(c) whether Government is planning to expand these initiatives to ensure full inclusivity in the education system; and
(d) if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(SHRI JAYANT CHAUDHARY)

(a) to (d)   The Government has put in place enabling regulatory frameworks, guidelines, incentives and enhanced software design features to ensure accessibility of digital education platforms for differently-abled students. Key measures in this direction are as under:

i.   DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), a national digital platform for school education, an initiative of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), under the aegis of Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India (GoI), has a dedicated vertical for Children with Special Needs. The vertical features a comprehensive page with a vast repository of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)-based e-content such as curriculum-aligned audiobooks, Indian Sign Language (ISL) videos, guides and handbooks for teachers, and an ISL-based dictionary, all accessible to students. Additionally, DIKSHA offers an accessibility plugin that enables users to customize the platform's interface, including features like text resizing, contrast adjustments, and reader compatibility, ensuring a more inclusive and user-friendly experience for students with diverse learning needs.

ii. NCERT is conducting a live interaction series, titled, "Teaching Learning Interventions for Inclusive Classrooms". Each episode is of half hour duration,

focusing on promoting inclusive pedagogy practices, by considering one class, one subject and one-chapter from textbooks, with mandatory ISL interpreter.

iii. SWAYAM; an indigenous digital learning platform of the Government of India (GoI) hosts MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) that contain audio-visual e-content which can be accessed by differently-abled students. UGC regulations allow students to earn upto 40% of credits in a semester through online learning courses offered through the SWAYAM Platform, thus making digital education a viable option for PwD.

iv. E-PG Pathshala - Approximately 23000 Plus Post Graduate e-content, that includes audio-visual e-content which can be accessed by differently abled students, is available at e-PG Pathshala (https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/) and freely accessible at one place to students/faculty/ academic fraternity.

v. UGC has notified the University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 which has several provisions to support digital education for persons with disabilities (PwD). This includes fee waiver and/or scholarships for pursuing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes, establishment of learner support centres in Higher Education Institutes for PwD and development of quality standards to ensure digital content is accessible to all, especially learners with disabilities.

vi. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has issued guidelines in August 2022 to facilitate inclusive digital education for all, including PwDs. The guidelines inter-alia require AICTE approved institutions to convert instructional materials into accessible format such as large print, braille, tactile graphics etc and provide subscription to online sources of accessible format books such as Sugamya Pustakalaya, as also assistive devices, such as digital book reading device, to students with disabilities.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 requires assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille) are made available in classrooms to mainstream and integrate children with disabilities. Measures as enlisted above have been leveraged across educational institutions, in varying degrees, to attain this objective.

The Government's commitment towards enhancing accessibility and inclusivity in education for persons with disabilities is enshrined in the National Education Policy 2020, National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage 2022 and National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023. As envisaged in NEP 2020, the Government has created several enabling mechanisms to achieve the objective of full inclusivity which is a continuous process.

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