

National Education Policy 2020 of India: A Systematic Framework to Achieve SDG4

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Abstract—The global education community is shifting its narrow focus from the quantity education to the quality education for all and due to this shift the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 is framed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. And all the developed and developing countries are instructed to revision and revamp their education system to ensure quality education for all and to fulfill SDG 4 by 2030. So, to provide the quality and equitable education for all its citizens, the Indian Government made a major shift by introducing and implementing National Education Policy in all levels of education system in 2020. This is the first 21st century policy in Indian Education System and it has transformed the Indian Education System in many ways. This paper discusses the overview of the National Educational Policy 2020 and also highlights the changes it brought in the school education system.

Index Terms—Enrolments, quality education, school education, education policy planning, sustainable development goals.

I. INTRODUCTION

The global education community is continuously making efforts to ensure education for all and for this reason, numbers of goals and targets have been framed from time to time. The Millennium Development Goals have proved quite effective in increasing the enrolments in school education in all the developing countries. However, the poor quality of education and private participation in education pose a serious threat to the goal of quality education for all. And so, the global education community shifts its focus from mere enrolments or from quantity to the quality of education. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is framed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by

2030. This lofty goal requires all the developing countries to reconfigure their education system so that they can achieve its targets by 2030.

In order to provide equitable and quality education to all and also to reap the benefits of demographic dividends of India, the Government of India appointed a committee to draft National Education Policy (NEP) under the Chairmanship of Dr. K. Kasturirangan in 2015 and this committee submitted its final draft of National Education Policy in 2018. This Policy has been drawn from previous policies such as National Policies of Education (1968, 1986 & 1992), TSR Subramanian Committee Report (2016), inputs by Ministry of Human Resource Development for the draft of National Education Policy and feedback from the ground level consultations with leading educators, scientists, artists and other eminent personalities working in the field of local art, culture and tradition. The draft National Education Policy includes Introduction and four parts: Part-I deals with School Education, Part-II relates to Higher Education, Part-III highlights Other Key Areas to Focus and last part is related to Making It Happen.

The final version of this policy has been approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020 and as compared to the final draft, the final version of the policy is quite concise and skips out many interesting features of the draft version. The policy recommends reforms at all levels of education starting from school education to higher education level and envisions an India centered education system that contributes directly to transform our nation sustainably into a knowledge society by providing quality education to all (GOI, 2018b; MHRD, 2020). The Policy states, “The aim must be for India to have an education system that ensures equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social and economic background.” The Policy seeks to address

the current development imperatives of the 21st century by creating a new education system that is based on the aspirational goals of this century as well as on the traditions and values of India. It has been pointed out in the NEP that the previous education policies, like National Policy on Education, 1986 and its modified form in 1992, has put strong focus on the access and equity in education with a lesser emphasis on the quality of education.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020

NEP, 2020 suggested many changes in all levels of education system in India. Regarding school education, the Policy suggests that every child in the age group of 3-6 years will have access to free and quality care and education by 2025. The two-part curriculum for this stage has been recommended and this curriculum would be implemented by improving and expanding the Anganwadi system. Special emphasis has been placed on the care and education of the children from the disadvantaged sections of the society as it has been pointed out that the children from these sections of the society perform poorly at primary level due to the lack of suitable pre-primary options. Regarding the universal access to education, the policy aims to,

Achieve access and participation in free and compulsory quality school education for all children in the age group of 3-18 years by 2030 (GOI, 2018b). The policy appreciated the efforts of SSA and RTE Act for achieving nearly universal enrolments in primary education and extend the coverage of RTE Act from 6 to 14 years to all children between 3 to 18 years of age. The inclusion of early childhood care and education in free and compulsory education is the most prominent feature of this policy as it has been considered that this level of education plays a critical role in the learning of students in further education. The RTE Act must also be extended to provide free and compulsory education up to Grade 12 and access should be increased at this level of education to ensure 100 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio. Suitable early childhood care and education will prove beneficial for enhancing the quality of education in primary and secondary level and will also reduce the dropout rate among students at these levels of education. The Policy observes that,

Bringing children who have dropped out back into educational fold as early as possible, and preventing others from dropping out is top priority (ibid.: 66).

Besides drop-out issue, the NEP also highlighted that the problem of out of school children and it has been reported that more than six crore children of school age were out of school in 2013 and so it is the top priority for the country to bring these children back into the school and also to prevent them from dropping out before the completion of secondary school. It has been pointed out in the Policy that in the last three decades significant progress has been made in bridging the gender and social gaps in school education, but despite this progress, the dropout rate of girls and children from the underrepresented groups is higher as compared to other children. So, special emphasis should be given to the education of children from the underrepresented sections of the society. The NEP recommended creating 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to provide quality and equitable education for all girls as well as transgender students. This Fund will assist the States to provide proper sanitation and separate toilet facilities in the school and even help these States in conditional cash transfer policies to increase the access to education among girls. This fund will also support the States for the community-based initiatives started to redress the gender and social gaps in access to education. As per the guidelines of Global Policy Perspective especially the Sustainable Development Goals, NEP 2020 also aims to provide quality and equitable education for all from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Besides enrolments, NEP put a strong emphasis on Learning for All (MHRD, 2020).

For expanding the access of school education, the Policy suggests that RTE Act requirements for schools will be made substantially less restrictive so that both government and non-government philanthropic organization can easily build schools according to the local requirements. The alternative models of education such as gurukuls, pathshala, madrasas and home schooling have been suggested besides government and non-government schools. The other important feature of this Policy is the restructuring of curriculum and pedagogic structure of school education from 10+2 system to 5+3+3+4 design. This design is further explained as follows:

- Foundational Stage of Five Years: three years of pre-primary school and Grade 1 to 2.

- Preparatory or Latter Primary Stage of Three Years: Grade 3 to 5.
- Middle or Upper Primary Stage of Three Years: Grade 6 to 8.
- High or Secondary Stage of Four Years: Grade 9 to 12 (ibid.: 75).

In addition to this restructuring of school education, the Policy gives due importance to the multilingualism and so three-language formula in the foundational stage of education has been proposed. The policy also gives due importance to the quality of education and aims to ensure that every student in Grade 5 and beyond will achieve foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025. It has been reported that approximately five crore students of elementary school all over the country have not attained foundational literacy and numeracy and if proper actions will not be taken at this time this number of students will get doubled in a decade. So, the highest priority should be given to the attainment of foundational literacy and numeracy skills by primary school children by 2025. An integrated and flexible school curriculum that will shift the focus from rote learning to the holistic, discussion and analysis-based learning has been suggested. The Policy aims to reduce curriculum load in each subject to essential core content to yield more space for discussion, understanding, analysis and application of the key concept. Reforms in the examination system of school education and school infrastructure have also been suggested. In brief, the policy addresses all the prevalent challenges of the education system of the country such as access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability.

To bring back the focus to education and learning, the Policy recommends that the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) will be redesignated to the Ministry of Education and the Union Cabinet has approved this recommendation. Increase in the public expenditure on education from the current 10 per cent of overall public expenditure to 20 per cent in the ten years has been suggested by the Policy. The Policy also points out that public education system of the country is plagued by the lack of timely disbursement of funds and so emphasis should be given to the smooth, timely and appropriate flow of funds and their usage with probity. It also calls for the support of the private philanthropic activity for

the rejuvenation of education system of the country and at the same time suggests to control commercialization of education system through 'light but tight' regulatory approach. The role of technology in teaching and learning has been emphasized and at the same time, it has been pointed out that technology can play a critical role in enhancing the access of education in remote areas of the country. The policy also proved helpful in reducing disparities in gender, caste, socioeconomic status and other such factors (Sharma, 2024)

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The reforms suggested by the Policy can play a significant role in the improving the education system of the country, however, as the previous policies and plans, the policy has certain drawbacks such as the emphasis on the alternative forms of schooling, the imposition of three-language formula in foundational stage and ignoring the role of state governments in the governance of school education, emphasis on private investment in school education, the introduction of semester system in school education and many other issues related to higher education. It has been questioned that how the policy recommendations regarding free and compulsory education for all children and adolescents between 3 to 18 years of age can be fulfilled without any constitutional commitment regarding the extension of RTE Act. The Policy has not given due consideration to the causes of a learning crisis in school education and no suitable educational reform has been suggested to improve the quality of education (Chimni, 2019; India Today, 2019).

It has also been criticized for the ambiguities regarding the medium of instruction and three-language formula in school education. Further, it has been also pointed out the execution of the policy recommendations requires a huge budget and it will be quite challenging for the policy to find its finances when the economy of the country is already in a period of stagnation (Ferrao, 2020). The public expenditure on education was approximately 2.7 per cent of GDP in 2017-18, even though the previous education policies, such as National Education Policy 1968, have also suggested to increase it by 6 per cent of GDP. However, even after repeated political commitments, the public expenditure on education in

India remained low and the NEP failed to provide any critical analysis of this issue that why the government spending on education has not increased even after years of political commitments. The policy, like the previous policies and based on the present scenario of education in the country, has promoted private participation in the education sector (Pillai, 2020). However, from analysis of the last five years, it can be concluded that NEP, 2020 is transforming the education system in India and is proving to be effective in enhancing the quality of education in government schools. The policy acts as catalyst for achieving SDG 4 in our country.

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