



National Education Policy - 2020: Perspectives on School Education in India

Srinibas Pathi*

Abstract

National Education Policy 2020 is the most ambitious and comprehensive reform exercise in the field of education in post-Independent India. It has tried to cover almost all segments, strata, and stakeholders of India's education scenario. School education forms one of the most critical and significant areas that requires urgent attention of all concerned. In fact, India has one of world's largest school education networks catering to one and half million schools, more than eight million teachers and two hundred and fifty million students spread across the length and breadth of the second largest populous country in the world. The present paper deals with some of the aspects of proposed and on-going reforms in the field of school education in India vis-à-vis the NEP 2020.

Keywords: *Education, School Education, Reforms, National Education Policy, Virtual School.*

Introduction

Education in India is as old as the Indus Valley Civilization which is about eight thousand years old that makes it the oldest system in the entire World Historyⁱ. During this long and eventful journey, the Education system in India has undergone innumerable changes, modifications and reforms by amalgamating different streams of thought both indigenous and foreign. Centuries of foreign domination has tried to introduce alien systems in India at different points of history that culminated in the predominance of English system of Education that is the direct outcome of more than three and half centuries of British presence in India prior to attainment of Independence. In the post-Independence era, the legacy of English system of Education continues. The education system in India has witnessed a number of major and minor modifications that led to the first comprehensive exercise called the National Education Policy of 1968ⁱⁱ. Some of the major elements of this policy include, among others, free and compulsory education, equality of educational opportunities, science education and research, and agriculture and industry. The next exercise

*Professor, Department of Public Administration & Former Dean, School of Social Sciences, Mizoram University, Aizawl, India. Email: srinibaspathi@gmail.com.

in this regard was The National Policy on Education, 1986. It emphasised on factors like eradication of disparities, reorganising the educational programmes, changes in school curriculum, Open University System and Distance Education in India.

The Policy of 1986 have been revisited and revised a number of times during the next three decades to incorporate the suggestions from many expert panels, study groups and regulatory agenciesⁱⁱⁱ.

NEP 2020

The ministry of Education (which replaced the Ministry of Human Resource Development), Government of India announced the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) on July 29, 2020 which is the outcome of deliberations and interactions with the stakeholders^{iv}. Some of the generic features of NEP2020 include universal access at all levels of pre-primary, primary, high school and higher secondary stages; early childhood care and education, new curricular and pedagogical structure that is five plus three plus three and four system, merging of components of arts and sciences into liberal education, bridging the gaps between curricular and extra-curricular courses and inter face between traditional and vocational education; establishment of a national mission on foundational literacy and numeracy, promoting multi -lingual pedagogy and Indian languages including mother tongues and local languages; and evaluation and assessment reforms.

Some of the other highlights of NEP 2020 are as follows: establishment of a national assessment centre called PARAKH or Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development; equitable and inclusive education by giving scope to Socially and economically disadvantaged groups; gender inclusion fund and special education zone; transparent processes for teacher recruitment, establishment of SSSA or State School Standards Authority; holistic multi-disciplinary education, and multiple entry and exit options; academic bank of credits, setting up of MERU or Multi-disciplinary Education and Research Universities and NRF or National Research Foundation; establishment of HECI or Higher Education Commission of India, HEGC or Higher Education Grants Council, NAC or National Accreditation Council, and NHERC or National Higher Education Regulatory Council.

So far as the major challenge of augmenting the gross enrolment ratio is concerned, NEP 2020 gives special emphasis on expanding distance and open education. It also aims at internationalization of education by facilitating the entry of foreign education providers and meaningful tie-ups with established educational institutions of India. There is a provision to establish stand-alone health sciences universities, technical universities, agricultural universities, law universities, etc. which would become multi-disciplinary academic institutions. There will be a National Mission for Mentoring in the country as well as a National Educational Technology Forum for integrating appropriate technology at all levels of education. Teacher education in our country would be stage-specific and subject-specific four year integrated bachelor degree programme. While different mechanisms would be in place to check commercialisation and the national goal of education should be achievement

of cent percent youth and adult literacy. A welcome indication for educational development in India will be synergy between the central and the state governments in matters of public investment with a view to providing at least six per cent of national income at different levels of our educational system.

The Central Government has arrived at The National Education Policy 2020 after due consultation with multiple stakeholders including that of the states, union territories, academic institutions, academic administrators, educational experts, representatives of market, mass media, civil society and many others associated with educational scenario in India. So far as revamping system of school education is concerned, very specific suggestions have been provided to integrate formal class room education with vocational education. This welcome step reminds us the merits of '*Nai Talim*' or new education or basic education scheme as suggested by Mahatma Gandhi, Father of our Nation who emphasised on a system of education that should impart both text book education and productive education. It also emphasised on respect for social custom, traditions, community values and environment-friendly education. The Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan (SSA) which was in operation for decades has been replaced by Samagra Shikshya (SS). It is an integral scheme which is sponsored by the Government of India. It is implemented by all the states and union territories in the country. It primarily aims at ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education at different stages of school education. In fact, Samagra Shikshya maintains that the term school is a continuum covering pre-school, primary school, upper primary school, secondary school and higher secondary school education.

Even without talking about the unforeseen challenges to school education in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school students have been facing a number of issues, problems and at times confusing signals that arise out of lack of clarity and understanding. NEP 2020 aims at making pedagogy in schools less stressful and more learner – centric. A number of innovative subjects such as coding and other types of computer programming that can modernise the curricula according to the mandate of NEP 2020. It further provides that examinations can start only from class three onwards. Particularly in classes of three, five, and eight, examinations may be conducted by designated authorities. The Board Examinations of class ten and twelve shall continue. There will be a gender inclusion fund especially meant for the girls' students and also for trans-gender students. The apex agency National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has been entrusted with the task of developing a set of national professional standards for teachers that should be in place by the end of the year 2022. The policy reiterates the emphasis on three-language formula at the level of school education. All the twenty-two languages mentioned in the eighth schedule of The Constitution of India as well as Sanskrit would be given due importance in this context. The pattern of examination at different levels of school education will be re-designed in such a manner that the students will be stress free and they will have enough of alternative ways and means to appear in the examinations. The National Council for Education Research and Training and its counterparts in the states like the SCERTs would develop a school quality assessment and accreditation framework to maintain and to upgrade regularly by standard of school education.

The Department of School Education and Literacy under The Ministry of Education, Government of India has developed SARTHAQ (students' and teachers' holistic advancement through quality education). It was released on April 08, 2021. It contains goals, outcomes, timeframe with flexibility and provisions for modifications according to local needs and ground realities.

So far as the implementation of NEP 2020 in relation to school education is concerned, the NCERT has devised a bridge course called OoSC (Out of school children). It is also meant for operationalizing the relevant portions of the Right to Education Act 2009. It would deal with the learning gaps and provide opportunity to such learners to be integrated with the main stream or regular schools. The NIPUN Bharat (national initiative for proficiency in reading with understanding and numeracy) that has been launched on July 5, 2021 ensures that all the children in India should have proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy by the time they complete their education in class three. This objective should be achieved during the academic year 2026-2027. The NCERT has also developed *Vidya Pravesh* or a three-month play-based school preparation module for grade one student.

In tune with the revised mandate of EBSB (Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat), NEP 2020 focuses on language learning and cultural integration through various tasks and activities. The SIATP (school innovation ambassador training programme) under the NEP 2020 is a joint effort by the innovation cell of the Ministry, CBSE, AICTE and Ministry of Tribal Affairs. This programme focuses both on the school teachers and students for idea formation, product design, product development, problem solving and critical thinking. MANODARPAN or a programme under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to provide psychological support to students, family members and teachers for mental health and emotional well-being during COVID 19 pandemic is a unique initiative under NEP 2020. NISHTHA (national initiative for school heads and teachers' holistic advancement) is a completely on-line programme meant for both elementary and secondary levels. Within one year, about twenty-four lakh elementary school teachers have completed on-line training modules. Another ambitious programme under NEP 2020 is NDEAR (national digital education architecture) which is an open and public digital education platform in support of innovations, best practices and participation of stakeholders. *E-Vidya* is an initiative to ensure equitable education. It integrates DIKSHA or a professional development platform for teachers. There are twelve *Swayam Prabha* TV Channels which cater to all the classes from one to twelve. They provide multi-modal learning facilities for students, teachers and others to bridge the digital divide in the country. NEP 2020 also provides for use of radio, community radio and *Shiksha Vani* or CBSE Podcast in multiple languages. There is the SAFAL (structured assessments for analysing learning) which is an assessment framework or assessment framework for classes three, five and eight. There will be an equity and excellence agency for assessment called PARAKH.

The Government of India has signed an agreement with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to participate in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) It could include creative and critical thinking, capacity

building of teachers and mentoring of school heads .The NIOS(national institute for open schooling) which promotes open and distance learning at high school and higher secondary levels of education has added a Virtual School under the mandate of NEP 2020. There has been a web portal named *Vidyanjali* which has been renovated as *Vidyanjali 2.0*. It would help the educational volunteers to connect and interact with schools to share their expertise and skills. Last but not least, NEP 2020 would promote Education for All and Lifelong Learning under New India Literacy Programme.

Conclusion

It is believed that the test of pudding lies in eating. So, the implementation strategies and objectives of NEP 2020 can be put to real test only after the components and modules are put to practice by the stakeholders. Of course, there will be initial teething problems as applicable to any revolutionary programme coupled with far reaching implications. So, we have to wait for couple of years from now for analysing and evaluating the National Education Policy 2020.

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ⁱ See the report by IIT Kharagpur & ASI in The Times of India, May 29, 2016.

ⁱⁱ Refer to https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968

ⁱⁱⁱ See https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE86

^{iv} See https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP2020