



Critical Analysis of ‘School Education’ as Reflected in National Education Policy, 2020

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Abstract

Being a signatory to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), India is committed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all children by 2030. Initiatives such as *Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*, *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)* and Right to Education (RTE) act, 2009 have given the desired impetus to the school education system in India. After long deliberations since 2014, the union cabinet has finalized and approved a comprehensive education policy after 34 years that strives to direct the Indian education system in the 21st century. With an aim to make India as Knowledge Superpower, the policy proposes some fundamental changes within the education system. The policy has almost emphasized every aspect of education, the biggest challenge ahead of the government is the nationwide implementation and achieving the learning outcomes. School education is the crucial part of any education system. NEP, 2020 has suggested many improvements in the Indian school education. The broad focus of this article is to present the critical analysis of school education component as proposed in National Education Policy, 2020.

Keywords: - National Education Policy, 2020; NEP, 2020; Critical Analysis, School Education

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Introduction

Education is essential for an individual as it helps him/her to develop into a productive member of a society to contribute in economic and social development. Recently, National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 adopted by the government of India to make improvements in the quality of education to help in the overall development of children for a better future.

The NEP, 2020 has replaced the 34-year-old National Policy on Education, 1986 and ushering in a new era of educational reforms. The final policy is based on the draft report submitted by a committee under the chairmanship of former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan. The government then opened the draft for public feedback in 2019. But unfortunately, it was approved by the union cabinet on 29 July, 2020 without parliamentary discussion or debate. The new policy built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability and aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student.

School Education: John Dewey has called school as '*miniature form of the society*'. School education not only helps a child to learn the basic skills which are necessary for his/her personal and social well-being but also lays foundation for learning future courses at higher level of education (Sylva, 1994). The present school education in India has passed through many milestones since independence. Most notably Kothari Commission, NPE (1968) and 1986, NCF 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005, Mid-Day Meal, SSA, RTE Act 2009, RMSA etc. have strengthen the school education. The NEP-2020 emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each child. The present article is an attempt to critically evaluate the school education part as proposed by policy.

Salient Features of School Education proposed NEP, 2020

This policy is going to replace the 10+2 structure of school education which was recommended by the Kothari Commission followed by 1968 & 1986 policy with a new pedagogical and curricular structure of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18. The existing 10+2



structure does not include the pre-primary education whereas the proposed 5+3+3+4 structure, will include a strong foundation of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3, aiming at better overall learning, development, and well-being of the individual. The following features of school education has been discussed in the policy:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education

With the fact that over 85 percent of a child's cumulative brain development has completed till the age of six; policy laying out most emphasis on ECCE. However, RTE Act, 2009 also accepted the importance of early childhood education and suggested to make necessary arrangement for the pre-school education. The 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) also focused on the importance of ECCE and government of India also launched National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy in 2013. But quality ECCE is unavailable to millions of young children, especially children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (NEP, 2020). The provision of necessary ECCE is a remarkable recommendation of this policy. The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain all-round development of children. For achieving this goal, policy envisages the structure as below:

- A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE will be developed by NCERT. ECCE shall be delivered through a significantly expanded and strengthened system of early-childhood education institutions consisting of
 - (a) Standalone Anganwadis;
 - (b) Anganwadis co-located with primary schools;
 - (c) pre-primary sections covering at least age 5-6 years co-located with existing primary schools; and
 - (d) stand-alone pre-schools
- For universal access to ECCE, every Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) will be strengthened with high-quality well-ventilated child-friendly infrastructure, play-equipment, and well-trained Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/teachers.
- Anganwadis shall be fully integrated into school complexes/clusters. It is envisaged that prior to the age of 5 every child will move to a "Preparatory Class" or



“Balavatika” (that is, before Class 1). The learning in the Preparatory Class shall be based primarily on play-based with a focus on developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities along with early literacy and numeracy.

- The mid-day meal and health checkup programme shall be extended to the preparatory classes in primary schools.
- AWWs will be trained through a systematic effort in accordance with NCERT pedagogical framework and these programmes may be run through digital/distance mode and will be mentored by the Cluster Resource Centres of the school education department.
- ECCE will also be introduced in Ashramshalas in tribal-dominated areas and in all formats of alternative schooling in a phase manner.
- The planning and implementation of ECCE curriculum will be carried out jointly by the Ministry of Education, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs. A special joint task force will be constituted for continuous guidance of the smooth integration of ECCE into school education.

2. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning

Policy reports that, over 5 crores elementary students have not attained foundational literacy and numeracy that is why achievement of universal foundational literacy and numeracy at grade 3 by 2025 will be the highest priority through National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, set up by the Ministry of Education. Following strategy will be adopted for this:

- Teacher vacancies will be filled at the earliest, in a time-bound manner especially in disadvantaged areas and areas with large pupil--teacher ratios or high rates of illiteracy.
 - Special attention will be given to employ local teachers. A Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) of under 30:1 will be ensured at the level of each school; areas having large numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students will aim for a PTR of under 25:1.
 - Teachers will be trained, encouraged, and supported with Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to impart foundational literacy and numeracy.
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- An interim 3-month play-based ‘school preparation module’ for all Grade 1 students will be developed by NCERT and SCERTs.
- A national repository of high-quality resources on foundational literacy and numeracy will be made available on the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA).
- A National Book Promotion Policy will be formulated to ensure the availability, accessibility, quality, and readership of books across geographies, languages, levels, and genres.
- Breakfast in addition to mid-day meals will be provided to all schools. In locations where hot meals are not possible, a simple but nutritious meal, e.g., groundnuts/*chana* mixed with jaggery and/or local fruits may be provided. Regular health check-ups shall be provided to all children especially for 100% immunization in schools.

3. Curtailing Dropout Rates and Ensuring Universal Access to Education at All Levels

Survey shows that a significant proportion of enrolled students drop out after Grade 5 and especially after Grade 8. So, a concerted national effort will be made to ensure universal access and affordable opportunity to all children from preschool to Grade 12 for their holistic development. Following strategies will be adopted:

- Effective and sufficient infrastructure along with an efficient teacher will be provided at all levels from pre-primary school to Grade 12.
- The credibility of government schools shall be re-established and this will be attained by upgrading and enlarging the schools by providing additional infrastructure.
- Alternative and innovative education centres will be established for children of migrant labourers, and other children who are dropping out of school due to various circumstances will be brought back into mainstream education.

4. Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools

The curricular and pedagogical structure of school education will be reconfigured in the light of different stages of children development. The new structure of school education will have:



- A. Foundational stage (in two parts, i.e., 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school + 2 years in primary school in Grades 1-2; both together covering ages 3-8) through play/activity-based learning.
- B. Preparatory stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), through play, discovery, and activity-based pedagogy.
- C. Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and
- D. Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18).
- Experiential learning will be adopted in all stages, along with standard pedagogy.
 - The assessment tools (assessment “as”, “of”, and “for” learning) will be adopted.
 - The medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language (mother tongue/local language) and it will be followed by both public and private schools. Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach.
 - The three-language formula will be implemented. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any state.
 - Along with Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian will also be offered at the secondary level to learn about the global knowledge and cultures.
 - Every student will take a fun course during Grades 6-8 and engage 10-day bagless hands-on experience in vocational crafts, such as carpentry, gardening, pottery making, electric and metal work etc.
 - A new and comprehensive National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2020-21 will be redesigned by the NCERT which will be strongly rooted in the Indian ethos and local context.
 - All students will take school examinations in Grades 3, 5, and 8 which will be conducted by the appropriate authority.
 - A National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) will be set-up as a standard setting body for student assessment and evaluation.
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- The National Testing Agency (NTA) will work to offer a high-quality common aptitude test in the different disciplines at least twice every year. Each university will be able to see each student's subject portfolio and admit them accordingly.
- Once internet-connected smart phones or tablets are available in all homes and/or schools, online apps with quizzes, competitions, assessments, enrichment materials, and online communities for shared interests will be developed.

5. Teachers

Teachers truly shape the future of our nation and are considered the heart of learning. The policy aims to improve the skills of teachers. In order to ensure that, the policy seeks to:

- Initiate a large number of merit-based scholarships across the country for studying quality four-year integrated B.Ed. programmes. The Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) will also be extended to cover teachers across all stages of school education.
- Teachers in private schools also must have a TET certificate, a demo and knowledge of local language(s) will also be conducted during the recruitment process.
- Schools/school complexes will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons in various subjects such as in traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture to benefit students along with preserve and promote local knowledge and professions.
- Teachers will be recruited through robust, transparent processes. Promotions will be merit-based, with a mechanism for multi-source periodic performance appraisals.
- Teachers will not be engaged in any non-teaching work and overburden will be stopped. Teachers doing outstanding work must be recognized, promoted and given salary raises.
- B.Ed. programme will also be available for career growth of teachers who wish to move into more specialized areas of teaching/leadership/management in the school system.
- A new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2021 will be formulated by the NCTE in consultation with NCERT.
- Action will be taken against substandard stand-alone Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) running in the country, including shutting them down, if required.



6. Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All

Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. This policy reaffirms to bridge the social gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school education. A brief status is given in following bullets:

- No child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background. Special emphasis will be given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).
- NEP emphasizes on setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund and also Special Education Zones (SEZs) for disadvantaged regions and groups.
- Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the foundational stage to higher education with necessary and appropriate facilities according to their needs. Home-based education will be provided to children with severe and profound disabilities and it must be treated as equal to any other child in the general system.
- Every state/district will be encouraged to establish “Bal Bhavans” as a special daytime boarding school to participate in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Free school infrastructure can be used as *Samajik Chetna Kendras*
- SEDGs with large populations should be declared SEZs, where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape.
- Additional Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas will be built around the country especially in aspirational districts and SEZs.
- Pre-school sections will be added to Kendriya Vidyalayas and other primary schools around the nation, particularly in disadvantaged areas.
- Barrier free access for all children with disabilities will be enabled as per the Right of Person with Disabilities(RPWD) Act.
- Schools and school complexes will develop a support mechanism to support children with disabilities.
- NCC wings in secondary and higher secondary schools will be established along with tribal dominated areas.



7. Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance through School Complexes/Clusters

The concept of school complex was firstly introduced by Kothari Commission (1964-66) and later acknowledged by NPE, 1986. The school complex is constituted by collaborating a group of elementary, secondary, and senior secondary schools, along with training and technical institutions with the objective to promote the standard of education by faculties and experience sharing. This dimension of school complex in NEP, 2020 endorses following points:

- Policy strongly endorses the idea of the school complex/cluster, wherever possible.
- The aim of the school complex/cluster will be greater resource efficiency and more effective functioning, coordination, leadership, governance, and management of schools in the cluster.
- Schools will develop their plans with the involvement of their School Management Committees (SMCs). These plans will then become the basis for the creation of School Complex/Cluster Development Plans (SCDPs). The SMC and SCMC will use the SDP and SCDP for oversight of the functioning and direction of the school and will assist in the execution of these plans.
- The twinning/pairing of one public school with one private school will be adopted across the country, so that such paired schools may meet/interact with each other, learn from each other, and also share resources, if possible. Best practices of private schools will be documented, shared, and institutionalized in public schools, and vice versa, where possible.
- Every State will be encouraged to strengthen existing or establish “Bal Bhavans” where children of all ages can visit once a week, as a special daytime boarding school, to partake in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Furthermore, the un-utilized capacity of school infrastructure could be used to promote social, intellectual, and volunteer activities for the community and to promote social cohesion during non-teaching / schooling hours and may be used as a “*Samajik Chetna Kendra*”.

8. Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education: Department of School Education will responsible for governance and regulation of the school education system. Following recommendations has been made for state school education system:



- The Department of School Education will be responsible for overall monitoring and policymaking while the educational operations and service provision for the public schooling system will be handled by the Directorate of School Education.
- The State School Standards Authority (SSSA) will set up for maintaining quality standards in school education. The SCERT will develop a School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF) through wide consultations with all stakeholders.
- The proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH with suitable cooperation with other governmental bodies such as the NCERT will assess all students across government as well as private schools. States will also be encouraged to conduct their own census-based State Assessment Survey (SAS), the results of which will be used only for developmental purposes, public disclosure by schools of their overall and anonymized student outcomes, and for continuous improvement of the school education system.

Critical Analysis

There has been considerable expansion in educational facilities all over the country at all levels. The NEP, 2020 envision to develop India “*as an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower*”. Though NEP, 2020 has given wide recognition to school education, discussed above, yet there are some concerns which need to be considered while addresses the policy.

1. However, previous policies accepted the importance of ECCE and made provisions accordingly, but NEP, 2020 has made it the compulsory part of school education. Early years are the most crucial for the development of the individual’s brain, hence millions of unprivileged children should be benefitted with ECCE (NEP, 2020). With this perspective, the policymakers have reimagined pre-primary education and have envisaged to integrate it with the extant formal schooling pattern. The streamlining of pre-school education is a welcome move and has rightly proposed activity-based, play-based and discovery-based pedagogies for our children. However, the following points are a matter of concern:



- ❑ NEP 2020 is offering nutritious breakfast, health check-ups, 100 percent immunization and issuing health cards. These are welcoming steps but there needs a strong plan of action for commitment to free and compulsory care and education from 0-6. The document also promises to achieve universal provisioning of ECCE by 2030 but it does not offer any clear roadmap. As per the Census (2011) India has more than 16 crore children in the age group of 0-6 years means around 14 percent of its population needs ECCE. The Policy does not commit any financial or policy roadmap to achieve this. It is worth noting that the NEP draft 2019 submitted by the Kasturirangan Committee recommended that *“the availability of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education for all 3-6-year-old will be included as an integral part of the RTE Act”* but the policy is silent on the extension of RTE act and its relation to Article 45 and 21 (a) of the Indian Constitution.
 - ❑ The policy does not clarify the strategy for 0-3 years children which are getting benefitted through the Anganwadi Centers. The “care” aspect of ECCE is invisible in the document especially for 0-3-year children and expected mother.
 - 2. The highest priority of the policy is to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy by all students by Grade 3 by 2025. All state/ UT governments shall immediately prepare an implementation plan for attaining this objective, closely track and monitor its progress. Teacher vacancies shall be filled as soon as possible and they shall be adequately trained and supported to impart foundational literacy and numeracy to students who have fallen behind. Unfortunately, NEP 2020 does not make any unequivocal statement on following issues:
 - ❑ Policy stated that National Foundation of Literacy and Numeracy Mission would be established for ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy and numeracy in Grade 3 by 2022. It is a welcome initiative of policy.
 - ❑ The practice of hiring contract teachers/para-teachers began in the mid-1990s (Ramachandran, 2020). According to the Unified District Information System for Education (2015-16) around 12.80 percent teachers are working as contractual basis (as cited by NUEPA, 2016). Many private as well as aided schools follow a dual system i.e., different pay for equal work which is against the spirit of the constitutional guarantee of equal pay for equal work. Further, Private-school teacher
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salaries are typically one-fifth of the salary of regular public-school teachers (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008). Evidence from studies that short-term contractual appointments have a negative effect on the motivation and social status of teachers (Kumari, 2018). Contract teachers are typically posted in the most-disadvantaged or poor areas and poorly-resourced schools. Policy neither make any strong statement on discontinuing the practice of hiring contract/para/guest teachers nor adjustment of contract/para/guest teachers. However, policy recognizes teachers “as the heart of the learning process” which should be welcomed. Further, there is no word regarding the recruitment process and service conditions.

- ❑ Policy makes provision for the recruitment of local teachers but there are no guidelines regarding the hiring authority, working conditions, salaries etc. Further, policy is silent on hiring authority of local teachers and role of school complexes in hiring them.
 - ❑ NEP lays focus on digital learning through DIKSHA but as per the Data of UDISE only 28 percent schools (18 percent government schools) have a computer and nine percent (four percent government schools) an internet connection (as cited by Singh, 2018). With the above fact how, policy implemented DIKSHA, no strategy has been discussed in the policy.
 - ❑ The policy has noted that morning hours after a nutritious breakfast can be particularly productive for the study of cognitively more demanding subjects and hence recommended expansion of the mid-day meal scheme to include provisions for breakfast in schools. However, the existing status of the scheme is pathetic. In Uttar Pradesh, the report stated that children were being served plain chapati with salt and in West Bengal children were seen eating plain rice with salt in a school (Kumar, 2019) and at some places the upper caste children refused to eat food cooked by SC/ST women. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India in its report (2015) said that *"Cases of cooking of poor-quality meals in unhygienic conditions, inadequate and poor quality of infrastructure in terms of kitchen sheds and utensils were rampant across all states exposing children to health hazards"*. So, the status of mid-day meal scheme should be critically evaluated before the expansion of the scheme.
3. The NEP intends to reduce the dropout rate and introduces changes to bring back dropouts to complete their education through effective infrastructural facilities and
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tracking students and their learning levels. But studies show that the average primary educational institution in India is in a dingy, dilapidated place without access to electricity, toilets and with few teachers (Raghwan, 2015). Though, policy is committed to improve infrastructure and affirms the deployment of teacher in a time bound manner, yet the situation needs to be studied well before execution of the policy. On the other hand, there is big gap between school education and teacher education. So, there needs to revisit the teacher education curriculum in line with school curriculum (Mohanty & Dash, 2018). Second privatization of teacher education activated the commercialization of it, which is the most significant cause of its deterioration. Hence, teacher education also demands revitalization.

4. NEP clearly states that the school curriculum and pedagogy will be reconstructed and learning will take place through activities and the play-way method.
 - ❑ The policy proposes to change the 10+2 school education structure with 5+3+3+4 structure, bringing children from ages 3-5 years within the formal education system for the first time and ensuring curricular continuity in the last four years. The proposed curriculum and pedagogical structure are good initiative of the policy.
 - ❑ The basic education should be provided in mother tongue of the learner and policy itself acknowledge this. But there is no definitive decision in the policy regarding the medium of instruction. For example, the policy says to use local languages ‘wherever possible’, which leaves a lot of room for the status quo. Further, the issue of learner’s ‘mother tongue’ and ‘home language’ being different from the local language used for instruction in schools, especially in the case of migrant and *Adivasi* families, has not been addressed. The medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language (mother tongue/local language) and it will be followed by both public and private schools. Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach. India has 1652 mother tongues; no state is having fewer than 12 mother tongues and number of mother tongues ranges from 12 to 410 (Chaudhary, 2003). So, practically there are many challenges regarding curriculum construction, preparing text-books and deployment of teachers to provide education in mother tongue. In fact, the backwardness of local languages, supremacy of English and imposition of Hindi as national language may further lead to various politico-linguistic conflicts.
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- ❑ The three-language formula as proposed by NPE, 1968, will be implemented for promoting multilingualism and national integration. Policy says that there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any state. Along with Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian will also be offered at the secondary level for students to learn about the global culture and knowledge. However, there are some problems regarding the implementation of three language policy. First, the text books in the regional/local language are not easily available. After 74 years of independence, text/learning material are unavailable in Hindi, which we are dreaming to be the national language. Second, the regional languages, besides of having place in eighth schedule of the Indian constitution, are used mostly within the state only. In northern region, particularly Hindi spoken states, Sanskrit, as third language, is most commonly studied by the students. There is big opposition by some states, like Tamilnadu, in accepting Hindi as national language. Third, the charm of English language and its importance in all sectors attracting the people more than any other language. So, there is a need of strong will power and determination to implement the policy in word and spirit. For raising Hindi as national language the status of regional languages should also be improved. The learning material should be published in all Indian languages to limit the supremacy of English. The study of regional languages should be promoted from school to higher education and scope of Indian languages in job market should be widened.
 - ❑ Policy states that vocational education will begin in schools from the 6th grade and will embrace internships but policy does not talk clarify how and where this bagless activity will be performed. Numerous skills have been enlisted in the document, but how these skills will be inculcated and how much time students will invest in the same are not clarified. Vocational education cannot be successfully implemented if it is not inclusively developed with industry. So, strong plan of action is needed to overcome these loopholes and successful execution of the policy.
 - ❑ The policy proposed to set up the PARAKH, as a standard-setting body under the Ministry of Education. It indicates that the government is keen to provide a regular check on the education system. This can be a game changer as it will not only help states to offer quality standardized assessments, but also aid in providing regular data
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for improving quality. In the long term, this could help India align with global benchmarks such as the Programme for International Student Assessment.

- ❑ Policy focuses on e-learning in schools but studies reveals that internet-connectivity in the government schools are poor. Data shows that more than 90 percent schools in 15 states, Union Territories do not have internet facility (Baral, 2019), another study revealed that only 37 percent of students in Zila Parishad schools have access to smartphones and 20 percent of them have internet connectivity (Deshpande, 2020). There is a digital gender gap as well. In India, less than one third of internet users are female (UNICEF, 2017 p.p 1). With the above facts, how will e-learning be promoted? Policy does not provide any clarification on this.
 - 5. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) said, *“Of all the different factors which influence the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the quality, competence and character of teachers are undoubtedly the most significant.”* The NEP 2020 too exhorts, ‘Teachers truly shape the future of our children and, therefore, the future of our nation’ thereby implying that teachers play the most important role in nation-building by creating high quality of human resource in their classrooms. The policy not only aims to transform education but also to improve the skills of teachers. Following points need to revisited:
 - ❑ The NEP, 2020 aims at converting the programme B.Ed. into a 4-year Integrated and it is welcoming initiative as it would enable students to complete the degree early and enter the teaching profession quickly. However, policy also recommends to continue one year and two years B.Ed. programme for Post-graduate and Graduate students respectively. NCTE by consultation with NCERT will develop NCFTE, 2021 for the above programmes. But we have witnessed that government could not appoint a full-fledged NCTE chairperson and vice-chairperson for 5 years. Further, the NCTE has failed to monitor the quality of teacher education for last decade. So, there is big need to strengthen the council and bring a separate policy to reform the teacher education in line with school education.
 - ❑ Policy says that, “Schools/school complexes will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons.....” There are numerous villages where colleges are located at a distant place and the transport facility is so poor that it is extremely difficult to attend college education. How will the policy ensure local teachers without ensuring the scope of
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college education in nearby locality with adequate transport facility? Further, what will be the eligibility, hiring process and condition of hiring these teachers? This still remains a question. Nation is witnessed the status of Guest Teachers/ *Shiksha Mitra* / Hired Teachers since long. This practice has not only degraded the status of teachers but also the quality of education. The Supreme Court of India has criticized and said in year 2013 that the '*Shiksha Mitra*' had actually turned out to be '*Shiksha-Shatru*' (enemy to education).

- ❑ The policy does not address the process of recruitment of teachers in the private sector. Policy should have mentioned the process, eligibility along with recruitment agency who will be responsible for checking the TET certificate and other eligibility along with their knowledge and skill.
6. Despite significant improvements in many crucial areas, Indian education systems continue to grapple with challenges of inequity and exclusion. Access to quality school education is still a dream for most rural populations and the vulnerable and marginalized groups. Policy does not reaffirm following gaps:
- ❑ Policy affirms that, “No child loses any opportunity..... birth or background. But it is problematic as the policy does not recognize the “*Bharat mein Jati Jaati nahi*”. In India caste and class are the most historical inhibitors. There is not a single word of *reservation* in whole document but studies reveal that no enrollment will be possible without the reservation.
 - ❑ Policy proposed the creation of a ‘Gender-Inclusion Fund’ to create better educational spaces for women and transgender individuals. Despite this proposal, the NEP is far from addressing core issues of inclusivity and conversations that are missing in the existing school systems like sexual abuse and harassment. Historically, school curriculums have remained silent on gender discrimination that girls and transgender individuals face in school as well as workspaces. Transgender people are not accorded the basic respect that citizens deserve, and even though there has been a judicial abolishment of Article 377, conversations around identity are still considered a taboo and have led to multiple cases of discrimination in the past against these individuals.
 - ❑ The policy recognizes children with special needs and believes in incorporating them into the mainstream education systems. However, the NEP appears to be over



ambitious and utopian on this front. It fails to recognize the fact that not only are most teachers poorly trained for such special assignments, it also misses to take into account how most of India's schools are grossly understaffed. The policy doesn't clarify or elucidate how it plans to create alternative homeschooling mechanisms that are accessible to individuals? what change in the curriculum would be done to make sure that children with learning disabilities don't feel excluded in the extremely competitive environments?

- ❑ One of the standout recommendations of the NEP is the proposal to set up SEZs in regions with significant population belonging to SEDGs and in those aspirational districts for spreading education in the remotest and farthest places in India. While this idea is novel and holds promise to transform educational access in inaccessible areas of the country, the policy hasn't specified what the criterion for these zones would be and how they will be distinguished in urban and rural landscapes?
- ❑ Policy legitimizes the practice of school mergers by recommending the rationalization of small schools that are considered "economically suboptimal and operationally complex to run". Shutting down schools in disadvantaged areas may lead to limiting access for girls, a setback for gender justice.
- ❑ The Constitution of India established the different socio-economic categories (SC/ST/OBCs) with the aim of providing social justice for the most disadvantaged. This provision has been repeatedly upheld by the Supreme Court of India and a cap of 50 percent placed on these reservations (Batra, 2020). There are several sections of society, including women, minorities, people with disabilities and the poor, whose needs require policy redressal. Policy mixes all these categories of disadvantaged and deprived groups into a single category: Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups. It could lead to the undermining of the foundational principles of social justice on which the Indian Republic was founded in 1950.
- ❑ The NEP coming with the idea of school complexes (schools within a 5-10-kilometer radius) and school rationalization policies for Children with Special Need (CWSN). This will help to ensure that there are adequate resources for children with disabilities including resource centers and special educators. This seeks to solve a key problem for children with disabilities however there is a grave shortage of special educators in



the country. Another problem is school distance, parents of children with disabilities have safety concerns with transportation. However, the RPwD provides for transportation for children with high support needs and their attendants, data indicates that transportation allowance or services are often not dispensed. Thus, there is a real danger that school complexes, in their intention to rationalize resources and ensure greater individualized resources and support may inadvertently lower attendance and enrolment of children with disabilities.

- ❑ Policy stated that home-based education will be provided to children with severe and profound disabilities. However, the provisions on education in the RPWD focus on creating a system of inclusive education through accessible buildings and classrooms and individualized support towards full inclusion. It is unclear how these provisions apply in the context of home-based education, an educational option the RPWD does not endorse. Further, endorsing home-based education, instead of stating how schools and classrooms can be made accessible and inclusive for children with additional support needs, raises questions about whether the educational system views some children with disabilities unworthy of inclusion.

7. This dimension of school education endorses following points:

- ❑ The NEP 2020 speaks about consolidating a large number of schools with very little strength of students and teachers into one complex. It is worth noting that this idea was first made by the Kothari Commission but was left unimplemented. A school complex would be made with one pre-primary to secondary school in its neighborhood including Anganwadis, in a radius of 5 to 10 km. The geographical dispersion and distance may be a big challenge to access equally school within the minimum distance. The document has stated that teachers function best in communities and teams, and so do students.
- ❑ Policy looks at the idea of “Twinning of Schools”, wherein one public school will be paired with one private school where both the schools learn from each other. This means the way of teaching, academic tools like smart classrooms and digital technology can be adopted by schools which don't use these techniques. However, policy does not specify on what basis the schools will be matched and twinned. Policy envisages that the paired schools share their resources without any financial



considerations. But why private schools will agree to share resources without charging a fee to public school and why government teachers will ready to teach in private schools.

8. The NEP has the vision to transform the regulation and governance of the school education system. Three of the key underpinning principles for this transformation are: transparent public disclosure, maximal empowerment and autonomy for institutions, and separation of roles and powers of regulation, operations, standard-setting, etc. School education would be regulated by a newly created quasi-judicial “State School Regulatory Authority”, based on a robust accreditation system, and the states’ Directorate of School Education will only be responsible for running and improving the public schooling system. An illustrative implication of this is, Block Education Officers will have no regulatory powers; they will be responsible only for running and improving public schools. This “accreditation system” is based on, and thus empowering of, local institutions such as peer schools, school management committees and panchayats. Further, multiple monitoring and overseeing frameworks by different institutions might lead to over-bureaucratization and redundancy in the regulation of the education system.

Concluding Remarks

Unfortunately, the Policy 2020 falls short on some very basic counts, which put the intentions of the drafters to test. In particular, policy leaves a lot to the imagination especially on account of implementation and funding strategies, and is filled with contradictory statements that take away from its core assumptions and intent. The aim of the policy is “*to have an education system that ensures equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social and economic background,*” for which policy “*proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance.*” (p. 3). However, the whole document nowhere elaborates what this means by revamping the education structure or its governance. In fact, radical reform is required in the governance architecture that has failed to deliver quality education to large sections of the population. The system of school education is gripped in the finger of bureaucracy from the ministry to block level and this bureaucracy ruins the school education system through their arbitrary decisions. This is surprising that after eight decades state bureaucracy has failed on



all fronts viz. human, physical and financial from planning processes to classroom practices and learning outcomes. Moreover, policy has numerous internal contradictions. For example, one side policy says that strict norms and standards to be maintained for teacher education and another side policy announce that *Pathshala, Gurukul, Madarsa*, home-schooling are being encouraged. Will teachers trained thus be able to teach in all these types of schools? How will learning standards be assessed in different models of schooling. Further, while a full complement of infrastructure is recommended for all schools, there is also a denigration of ‘inputs’ and hence the encouragement of flexible models where infrastructure may be of less than the desired standard. A question then arises: Do *Pathshala, Gurukul* and *Madarsa* represent inclusion and access to all? Do they even meet the learning standards? Even though much of the responsibility for learning has been put on teachers, the confusion related to them continues in the proposal for filling vacancies. Another area of confusion related to the twin objectives of serving the global and the local. For example, the document makes many references to global studies, practices, globalization, knowledge economy, etc., and at the same time it is very forceful in its claims of being “India-centered.” It is particularly troubling when the only ancient scholars mentioned belong to the majority community, ignoring the contributions made by several others.

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