

National Education Policy

A Situation Analysis for Teachers

1. Introduction

Education has been hailed for its intrinsic value, as an enabler, as a foundation for developing human capital which increases productivity for human beings and as a way to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development (UNESCO 1996).

In India, all segments of society have not had equitable access to basic school education. Many students come from Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG), including Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities and Muslims. The children from SEDGs, in particular, have poorer access to education vis-à-vis the general category students. The recently introduced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 attempts to redress such challenges. In Section 2, some of the major problems affecting school education are discussed, in the pre-COVID and the post-COVID context. In Section 3, the NEP 2020 and some of the main educational reforms it suggests are discussed. Section 4 presents the discussion around the role to be played by school teachers for realization of the reforms and the actual status of the teachers at present. Section 5 concludes.

2. Major areas of challenge in the Indian school education system

2.1 The pre-COVID context

It was mentioned at the outset that all children in India do not have equitable access to school education. The Government initiatives to close the gaps in the education access and in the outcomes, between the various communities, include flagship programmes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001 and the landmark Right to Education Act introduced in 2009. Yet the fault lines in the society are persistent. Government strategies to address exclusion have been able to expand access to an extent, but have not been able to keep all children in school for a sustained period, leading to dropout and poor attendance. Above all, educational outcomes have been far from satisfactory with surveys indicating learning competencies well below the level matching with the class students are studying inⁱ.

In particular, drop-out rates in 2017-18 at the elementary level (classes I to VIII) was 2.25% for general category students, against 5.45% for SC, 4.45% for ST and 4.31% for OBC students.ⁱⁱ At the secondary level (classes IX-X), for the same year, the drop-out rate for general category students was 13.63% vis-à-vis 22% for SC/STs and 20% for OBCs. There are other

concerns with the education dispensation, including those that have come about despite opposite intentions stated in the policy documents.

There is a focus on the three r's and students do not get to discover and/or follow their passions as a part of the school curriculumⁱⁱⁱ. This focus also results in low emphasis on inculcating values such as conscientiousness, compassion, sharing, empathy, honesty, etc. among students^{iv}. In the present dynamic world, with more complexities, technological change, etc. such social and emotional skills are becoming increasingly important. These skills differ from cognitive abilities because they mainly relate to how people manage their emotions, perceive themselves and engage with others, rather than reflect their raw ability to process information (OECD 2020). In this context, teaching a sense of equality between the sexes is also important at an early age.^v

There is a focus on information-dense text-books and reproduction of this information (through rote learning) by children during the exams. The need to complete a fixed syllabus in the school curriculum which often involves completion of lessons by teachers, regardless of whether majority of children understand the lessons or not.

In case the medium of instruction differs from a child's mother tongue, it constitutes a barrier to learning. This is true for children from ST families, for instance, and also for children from low-educated families learning in English medium^{vi}.

At the higher levels of education (secondary and higher secondary), relentless competition takes its toll on adolescents, and sometimes leads to mental health issues.

2.2 Issues pertaining to post-COVID situation

In the post-COVID-19 scenario, following the nation-wide lockdown with accompanying school closure for nearly two years, technologically-driven instructional techniques have contributed further to the already existing educational inequality between SEDG children and others (ASER 2020, SCHOOL survey 2021, UNICEF and IHD 2021). The reliance on technology has resulted in new challenges and deepened the existing digital divide.

The emergency report of the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) survey (August 2021) for 15 states and UTs focused on relatively deprived hamlets and *bastis*. The survey of 1362 sample households found that in rural areas, only 28% children were studying regularly at the time of the survey, and 37% were not studying at all.

Several sources of inequality are present.

- Costs associated with technology adoption: With more dependence on technology, children from deprived communities may lack access to smart devices, internet connectivity and electricity. Recharge costs for mobile data may prove prohibitive for them. Using parental education as a proxy for affluence, a report finds for 6-16-year-old rural children that 45% of those with low parental education are likely to have a smartphone as compared to 79% of children with high parental education (ASER 2020).
- Lack of digital literacy: Students lack digital literacy and also receive little guidance at home since parents are not educated (UNICEF and IHD 2021).
- Habitat and environment: In rural areas, some families live in remote areas where access to electricity and internet availability is relatively poor. This is especially true of SC/ST families. Close to 60% of the sample in the SCHOOL survey comprised SC/ST children and their learning outcomes were found to be worse than the average child, even among underprivileged households.
- Language: Language is a challenge area, since online transactions and associated instructions are mostly in English.
- Gender issues: India has a patriarchal society, so girls who stay at home and learn online are more likely to be under pressure to do household chores and thereby neglect studies. They may run a greater risk of dropping out and getting married early compared to pre-COVID situation^{vii}. They may suffer from social isolation while their agency as independent individuals gets adversely affected.

3. National Education Policy 2020 and education reforms

The **National Education Policy 2020** aims to ensure access and afford all children opportunity to obtain quality education from pre-school to Grade 12, including vocational education. According to this new policy document, the curricular and pedagogical structure and the curricular framework for school education will be guided by a 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 design, consisting of the Foundational (3 years of preschool + Grades 1-2), Preparatory (Grades 3-5), Middle (Grades 6-8), and High school (Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e. 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second) stages respectively, with an option of exiting at Class 10 and re-entering in the next phase.

It is a positive development that many of the concerns cited in Section 2.1 find mention in the 2020 NEP document, along with suggestions for addressing the same.

The NEP 2020 states that ‘*The purpose of education is to develop good human beings - capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values*’ (Introduction, GoI 2020). It is founded on the five guiding pillars of: access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. A holistic assessment of students’ progress is suggested comprising assessment from teachers, self & peer, progress in cognitive, affective & psychomotor domains, progress in project-based & inquiry based learning, in quizzes/role play/group work etc.

The purpose of education as per NEP 2020 highlights not only rationality, but compassion, empathy, courage, scientific temper, imagination and values. Many of the issues flagged in Section 2.1 have been put at the centre-stage in the NEP. The document also emphasizes access along with equity, quality and affordability, thus providing the necessary stress on inclusive education with the aim to reduce dropouts. Some selected areas of education which are relevant in the context of the issues discussed in Section 2.1, and which the NEP 2020 addresses are mentioned below:

Curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels: Citing near-universal enrolment at the primary level, the report mentions that the data for higher classes indicate ‘*some serious issues in retaining children in the schooling system*’ (Section 3.1, GoI 2020). It suggests two initiatives to curb/prevent dropouts: (i) expansion/upgradation of school infrastructure and (ii) tracking students and their learning levels to get them back on track. In order to achieve this, counsellors or well-trained social workers and teachers will work with students and their parents, and will travel through and connect with communities to ensure that all school-age children are attending and learning in school (Section 3.2, GoI 2020).

Equitable and Inclusive Education; Learning for All: Despite progress towards bridging gender and social category gaps in all levels of school education, large disparities still remain - especially at the secondary level - particularly for some groups that have been ‘*historically underrepresented in education*’ (Section 6, GoI 2020). The Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) can be categorised based on gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions. Various measures to remedy the disparities include providing bicycles, etc. to improve access to school, especially for female students; peer tutoring, open schooling and appropriate infrastructure to ensure access for certain children with disabilities; focus on early childhood care and education for children from disadvantaged groups; hiring of counsellors and teachers to work with

students, parents, schools, and teachers in order to improve attendance and learning outcomes, especially in urban poor areas. Other measures suggested are: formation of Special Education Zones, creation of a ‘Gender Inclusion Fund’, among others.

Holistic development of learners: The thrust of curriculum and pedagogy reform will be to move the education system towards real understanding and learning how to learn - and ‘*away from the culture of rote learning as is present today*’ (Section 4.4, GoI 2020). With focus on concepts, ideas, applications, and problem –solving, the classroom transaction will be more interactive; ‘*questions will be encouraged....*’ (Section 4.5, GoI 2020). Students will be given increased flexibility and choice of subjects to study, particularly in the secondary school.

Curricular integration of essential subjects and skills: Amidst the flexibility in choosing individual curricula, certain subjects and skills should be learned by all students. In addition to proficiency in languages, these skills include a wide array such as scientific temper and evidence-based thinking, creativity and innovativeness, health and nutrition; physical education, digital literacy, ethical and moral reasoning, among others (Section 4.23, GoI 2020).

Multilingualism and the power of language: Wherever possible, 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 (Section 4.11 and 4.12, GoI 2020).

Reimagining Vocational Education: In order to address the inferior perception regarding vocational education in India, the policy would require all educational institutions to integrate vocational education programmes into mainstream education in a phased manner, beginning with vocational exposure at early ages, quality vocational education through middle and secondary school and smoothly into higher education (Section 16, GoI 2020). By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system will have exposure to vocational education. The number of students in vocational education will be considered while arriving at the Gross Enrolment Ratio target.

4. Realization of the Reforms: Teachers as the Main Instrument

In order to realize the lofty vision of the NEP 2020, there will be need not only of huge financial resources, but also of high-quality human resources. The most important among the human resources in the school education system are the teachers.

4.1 Expected responsibilities of Teachers

The discussion presented in Section 3 indicates that be it to teach children in an interactive way and bring them away from rote learning, or to help them to acquire skills in languages, scientific

temper and evidence-based thinking, creativity and innovativeness, health and nutrition, physical education, digital literacy, ethics, among others, or to assess their cognitive and non-cognitive skills, it is the teachers who will shoulder the main responsibility. They are also expected to interact with students and parents continuously to meet the challenges of dropout and attendance. In collaboration with other key stakeholders, teachers are expected to play an important role in the governance of schools/school complexes, including as members of the School Management Committees/School Complex Management Committees (Section 5.11, GoI 2020).

The teachers will need to address the educational requirements of students coming from widely different environments, who are challenged by poverty, parents with little educational capital, among other barriers. They will need to address language-barrier related problems in class, encourage talented and gifted students by providing them supplementary enrichment material and guidance (Sections 4.9 and 4.43, GoI 2020). Since vocational education exposure will happen early on, even before middle school, the teachers will need to pay attention to those areas as well. There may be dedicated teachers for various aspects of the education, but increasing the number of teachers will also have to be balanced by consideration of financial resources. With all these responsibilities, the teachers will have to complete the given syllabus and assure adequate learning outcomes for the students.

A recent study has shown conclusively the importance of teaching quality for students' learning outcomes (Azam and Kingdon 2014). The authors estimate the Teacher Value Added (TVA), which captures teacher quality of each teacher by looking at the variation in students' scores in different subjects in the senior secondary board examination, controlling for the score in the same subject in the secondary board examination. Being taught over a two-year period by a high-quality teacher rather than a low-quality teacher, adds 0.476 of the standard deviation to the score. Therefore teacher recruitment is very important in the matter of attaining quality education for children, especially with the wide array of responsibilities they are expected to discharge.

4.2 Status of Teachers and Teacher Recruitment

At present there are 9.687 million teachers in schools teaching around 265 million students of pre-primary to higher secondary level^{viii}. In 2019-20, for the first time, the number of female teachers (4.92 million) is higher than the number of male teachers (4.77 million). There are

more female teachers at the lower levels of schooling; the upper primary level onwards, male teachers exceed the female teachers in number.

According to the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), the academic and professional requirements to become a teacher at the primary level are: Senior Secondary School certificate or Intermediate or its equivalent; and Diploma or certificate in basic teachers' training of a duration of not less than two years.^{ix} An alternate option is the Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.). At the upper primary level the requirement is Senior Secondary School certificate or Intermediate or its equivalent; and Diploma or certificate in elementary teachers training of a duration of not less than two years. The alternate option is B.El.Ed. Another alternative is Graduate with B.Ed. or its equivalent^x.

The NEP 2020 has suggested a move towards a 4-year integrated B.Ed. degree which will include knowledge content and pedagogy, as well as strong practicum training in the form of student-teaching at local schools.

4.2.1 Assessment of teacher eligibility

The Teacher Eligibility Test was established in 2011 to standardize the way that pre-service teachers were qualified. The assessment is managed both at the central and at the state levels. While passing the TET is mandatory for all teachers working at the elementary level, issues have been flagged around the quality of the assessment and specific questions asked, with complaints regarding theoretical questions and need for memorisation of facts rather than understanding of practical teaching approaches^{xi}.

Pass rates for TET have been very low. As of the Central TET held in January, 2021, the pass rate was 33.26% for Paper 1 (for the primary level teachers), and it was even lower at 20.93% for Paper 2 (for those who want to teach at Upper primary level). Those who want to teach classes 1-8, must clear both papers. The number of candidates who appeared for the two papers were 12.5 lakh and 11.4 lakh respectively.^{xii} In 2018, the CTET results showed even poorer pass percentage at less than 20%. In a recent development, the education ministry extended the validity period of TET qualifying certificate from 7 years to lifetime with retrospective effect from 2011^{xiii}. This implies that there will be no re-assessment of teachers once they qualify with TET.

It is possible that the low level of pass percentage is due to the inadequate assessment process, or it may be due to the inadequate competence of the aspirants. An examination of sample CTET papers does indicate that quite a large number of questions are asked based on theory.

As such, a good performance for TET need not lead to selection of teachers who will be good at teaching small children at the primary level. Similar observations have been made by Azam and Kingdon in their study on teacher quality. They find that teacher quality is not explained by observed teacher characteristics such as experience, gender, training or education. *‘It is the unobserved factors such as drive, passion, connection with the students, etc. that are likely to account for a majority of the variation in TVA across teachers’* (Azam and Kingdon 2014). Thus there is a greater need of observation of candidates in class, so that recruitment is more in keeping with the practical requirement.

The NEP 2020 has also acknowledged the need for care in teacher recruitment and mentions the need for classroom demonstration/interview to gauge passion and motivation for teaching^{xiv}.

5. Concluding remarks

The above discussion shows that while teachers are the cornerstone of the planned education reforms so that students can learn together and become future citizens with a moral compass, the very quality of the teachers is in question. The low pass rate of TET, the inadequacy of the recruitment process, and the fact that the teachers are also coming out of the existing inadequate education system, imply that this area needs a great deal of attention before the economy can move towards a more idealized education system as visualized in the NEP^{xv}.

References

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ⁱ ASER reports accessed at www.asercentre.org

ⁱⁱ DISE Flash Statistics on School Education 2017-18 accessed at http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/Flash_Statistics_on_School_Education-2017-18_Provisional.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ There is also an over-riding societal disposition towards occupations such as engineers, doctors, etc. which influences the schooling process.

^{iv} The prescribed literature books do attempt to teach values to the children, but actual team-work and activities are expected to teach the same in a much more practical manner. In this context, incorporation of the increasing awareness about the environment and the need to take responsibility for the same, in school textbooks and activities, does appear to have made students more environment-conscious than earlier.

^v It is known that women do a disproportionate share of unpaid work in the household, but such work is not regarded as ‘work’ since it is not paid. The societal structure encourages children to overlook such work for what it is and the required gender-sensitisation can be done in the school milieu.

^{vi} Rami 2012, Jhingran 2005, Endow 2021

^{vii} The Childline Centre reportedly intervened to stop 5,584 child marriages amid lockdown. Accessed at <https://thefederal.com/news/centre-intervened-to-stop-5584-child-marriages-amid-lockdown/>

^{viii} 2019-20 UDISE + Accessed at <https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/#/home>

^{ix} Accessed at <https://ncte.gov.in/Website/NCTEACT12.aspx#1>

^x At the Secondary/High School level, the requirement is Graduate with B.Ed. or its equivalent, or four years’ integrated B.Sc., B.Ed. or an equivalent course. At the Sr Secondary/PUC/Intermediate level, the requirement is Master’s Degree in the relevant subject with B.Ed. or its equivalent, or two years’ integrated M.Sc.Ed. course or an equivalent course.

^{xi} ‘The school education system in India: An Overview’, July 2019, British council.

^{xii} Accessed at <https://www.collegedekho.com/exam/ctet/cut-off-results>

^{xiii} Accessed at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/83200350.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

^{xiv} Section 5.4 NEP 2020

^{xv} The associated requirement of financial resources is not discussed in this paper.