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MERI
COLLEGE

Management Education and Research Institute

52-55, Institutional Area (Opp. D Block), Janak Puri, New Delhi – 110058

Phone : 011-28522201, 28522202, 28522203 Fax : 28522204

Email : meribs@meri.edu.in Web: www.meri.edu.in

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Editor: Dr. S.P. Pathak

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends,

Knowing fully well that many an eye brows will be raised at what I am to state in the following lines . I am writing all this with the fond hope that some actions may be taken to remove the hurdles or the road blocks that will come in the way to give a practical shape to what has been so fondly and assiduously stated in the National Education Policy 2020. I do not claim to be an expert but the truth is “The destiny of India is now being shaped in her class rooms” (the opening sentence of the Kothari Commission 1964-1966 Report) which is as true today as it was then and will remain so forever. It is a truism and needs no elucidation. Not to be outdone, the National Education Policy too has underscored the great significance of Education in most glowing terms when it says:

“ Education is fundamental for achieving human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development --universal high quality education is the best way forward for development and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for the growth of the individual, the society ,the country and the world.”

I feel tempted to quote the National Education Policy 2020, when it says:

“ The gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged through undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality equity and integrity into the system from early childhood care and education through higher education”

Above two quotes are most laudable and express our noblest yearning .

But the real question is not of “ WHAT” but “HOW”. Though the policy has tried to spell out some schemes but again the question is how to implement them at the grass root level.

Here I am once again tempted to quote National Education Policy, when it laments over the state of the Teacher Education program. It says:

“ According to Justice J. S, Verma Commission (2012) ----majority of Stand –Alone Teacher Education Institutes, over 100 in number, are not even attempting serious teacher education, but are essentially selling degrees for a price.”

In short, Education has become the greatest trading business and only wishful thinking and noblest of noble words without being converted into action, has been the undoing of our country and our education, which is the surest instrument to bring about the most coveted changes, as articulated very authentically and rightly by the Education Policy. Here I would

like to request my learned readers to wait for a moment and think of colossus harm done to our country through this ignoble situation. If 10000 such teacher colleges produced about 100 students ay ear then they would have produced such ill equipped teachers numbering about 10 Lakhs in 10 years and what a havoc this must have created for the nation by producing ill educated or half baked students – the future of the Nation through these ill qualified teachers . The great and irreversible harm done to the nation is beyond imagination and still we are talking and talking aloud that education is capable of doing good to the nation, without taking urgent steps to ameliorate the situation.

Hence once again with a very heavy heart I would say -- Enough of “WHAT.” Now the time has come to take immediate, concrete measures to realize the “WHAT”without wasting time and thus ensuring a bright future of our children and thereby of our society.

However I know for certain that my voice is just a cry in the wilderness and not many who matter, would take cognizance of what I have said . And this statement, I make for the reason, that on T.V we are shown an advertisement saying “ **Jago Grahak Jago**” by our illustrious Government whereas the message to be flaunted should be “ **Jago Govt Jago**’ ,obviously for the reason that it is the Govt's job to stop the adulteration and hence the slogan should be “ **Jago Govt. Jago**”.

Enough of passing on the buck to others . Now the time requires Action and no SERMONS.

Dr. S.P. Pathak,
Editor

Dr. Sushil Dhiman,
Associate Editor

Note: Our special thanks to **Dr. Vikas Baniwal** and his able team who analysed the NEP 2020 in depth and submitted their report on time.

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Considerations for Reflections on an Educational Policy

Vikas Baniwal

Introduction

Of all the documents that are written regarding education in a country like India, the education policy takes the centre stage. It articulates the nation's hopes, ambitions, vision and future direction. Therefore, it is never a neutral technical activity, rather it “is invariably a deeply political, ethical and cultural one, bound up with ideas about the good society and how lives can be worthwhile” (Winch & Gingell, 2004, p. vi). Thus, it is an activity that is not solely based on empirical evidence, for the interpretations of any set of collected data may vary, but it is not a completely ideational activity, for it has to consider socio-political and economic implications. Further, the “justification for all reflective activity can only be properly assessed by the contribution it makes to human life” (Macmurray, 1952, p. 89). Thus, one may argue for or against any position with equally compelling data and logical coherence. For example, one may argue for more spending in the private sector by referring to the empirical evidence of an increased GDP as an outcome of such an investment, whereas, one may also argue for spending more on social security and education for all by referring to data that establishes a direct relationship between the happiness of people with a more equitable social structure. Thus, there is a need to develop not just a perspective on the policy as a whole, but also the ability to analyse the parts of it and the interrelationships between them. Without such an analysis “education policy is more likely to be muddled and inconsistent, overly concerned with the tangential or trivial, and so tremendously busy with getting things done that the possibility of foolishness outweighs the likelihood of wisdom” (Fielding, 2000, p. 377).

Generally, policy analysis is understood to be constituted of “program evaluation, cost-benefit and cost analysis, needs assessment, single-subject or case studies, surveys, secondary data analysis, implementation studies, and outcome studies” (Einbinder, 2010, p.327). However, such an approach to analyse an educational policy would be “decidedly non-educational in its terms of reference” (Prunty, 1985, p.134), because these are largely limited to the concepts and methods borrowed from economics, political science &/ or sociology. This approach to analyse and reflect on a policy document by submitting it to a set of concepts and theories that are central to a discipline other than education, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, or to interdisciplinary fields like management, conceives of education only as a field, which has no theory of its own. It enables people from different disciplines to analyse educational policies, but such an analysis cannot be holistic lest its nature is multidisciplinary and

Dr. Vikas Baniwal : Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
University of Delhi, Delhi

interdisciplinary.

However, there are many who consider education itself as a discipline and refer to education studies or educational studies for providing a framework of analysis (Ward, 2004; Burton & Bartlett, 2009). Such an analysis bases itself not only in a coherent conceptual framework, but also in the collected educational experiences, pedagogical insights, and empirical researches. Scholars, such as Wildavsky (1979) and Hoos (1972), have been critiquing the use of concepts, like Management by Objectives, Social Indicators, Program Evaluation Review Technique, and Cost-Benefit Analysis, which are borrowed from other disciplines, problematic for the lack of a holistic vision building for education, and this way of policy formation and analysis since the 1970s. Scholars have found that in India “institutionalized policy analysis still maintains a substantially rationalist character, and is less engaged with making a practical contribution to the emerging discourse of a participatory democracy” (Mathur & Mathur, 2007, p.613).

As an alternative to the prevalent rationalist approach, the papers included in this volume, take cues from some of Prunty's (1985) 'signposts', such as: “an educational policy analysis must attend simultaneously to the workings of the school and the workings of society” (Prunty, 1985, p.135); that “an *educational* policy analysis must be conducted from within a moral and ethical stance” (Prunty, 1985, p.135, emphasis original); and, “[to] ask what counts as knowledge and culture in the schools is also to ask, 'whose values have been validated?’ (Prunty, 1985, p.136). These ideas have motivated the authors' writings in the present volume to take up issues that they find significant while looking at the policy from their own context and location. The underlying belief is that knowing how to think is not sufficient, as often, what one thinks about turns out to be more significant because it emerges from the lived reality of the thinker. In this way, analysis of any policy document can also be thought of as a subversive act, in which one brings forth the biases, prejudices, political agendas, and potentially oppressive ideas in formulations of the policy document. Such a reflexive engagement concerns itself more with the foundations and processes of policy making rather than its outcome.

This engagement of an educational policy with the lives of the people needs explication right from the beginning of the policy-making process, for there are “different and competing views about what constitutes the good life, about human nature, about justice and equality, about what is worth learning and why, and about the purposes of education in relation to these” (Smith, 2013, p.1). The first question, therefore, should be “[how] far is NEP 2020 a

'National' policy? Or is it only a policy of the Union Government?" (Menon, 2020). The question is important because even though there was an elaborate process of consultations along with the space to give feedback and comments on the draft NEP since 2019, however, "deviating from the precedent set by the earlier national policies, the present policy was approved by the Union Cabinet, bypassing Parliament altogether" (Menon, 2020).

As for how to think about a policy document, there could be multiple ways to approach the same. The basic shared understanding amongst the authors has been that one must seek clarity, coherence, cogency, and sound arguments as basic elements in a policy document. To begin its analysis, one may first reflect on the way a policy or part of it has been written in terms of different 'languages' of policy debate, which can be roughly labelled as 'official', 'professional', 'research' and 'popular' (McLaughlin 1999, 37-38; cited in McLaughlin, 2000, p.442). Such an analysis can give a sense of its openness, accessibility, answerability, and transparency. It makes a lot of difference if the policy document is written in an ambiguous, verbose, and loaded language or whether it is written with precision and clarity. However, an analysis must not be limited to these criteria, rather, one must move towards an inquiry into the use of concepts in the policy document. Often, policy documents use loaded terms without properly unpacking them or without analysis. Such an act of conceptual analysis brings forth the hidden confusions, overlaps, misunderstandings, incoherences, and slogan-like usage of concepts that have gained positive connotations in a particular society. For example, teacher empowerment or the respect of a teacher as a professional have been highlighted frequently in the policy documents, however, in India as well as elsewhere, is it anything more than being a matter of slogans? Has there been any improvement in the actual conditions of teachers? Are we re-packaging the same old slogan of 'child-centred education' when there is no clarity in the idea itself, let alone the structuring of the process of schooling around it.

The policy also refers to Indian culture on multiple occasions whereas nowhere does it actually define, what it is. A lot has been left implied in it. Similarly, the policy highlights experiential learning as its innovative aspect, whereas in reference to experiential learning it highlights "hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, story-telling-based pedagogy" (NEP-2020, p.12), gamification and apps (NEP-2020, p.12), which is closer to sensory experience rather than social experience of NCF-2005 which referred to the development of an experiential base "through more evolved forms of work in the school, including social engagement" (NCF-2005, p.112). Though both these documents include art and craft in them, however, their conception of experience is quite different. Does NEP-2020 play the same old tune of 'hands-on activities', 'skill-development', and 'activity-based

learning' in the guise of 'experiential learning'? One may analyse other ideas such as holistic education and inclusive education for a better understanding of an educational policy.

Reference to other policy documents brings us to another aspect of policy analysis-comparison. A policy document written in India would have some comparative features with a policy document of its neighbouring countries, owing to different reasons, such as, political and cultural past, diversities, philosophical notions, and economic context (For example, see Sharma, 2020 for an analysis of curriculum frameworks of India, Pakistan, & Bangladesh). At the least, a policy document must be read within the context of previous policy documents to outline its trajectory. For a comparative analysis of NEP-2020, we have documents such as NPE-1986, NCF-2000, NCF-2005, NCFTE-2009, and RTE-2009. However, there could also be certain aspects of a policy that may not have many parallels, for example, NEP-2020 is being lauded as a milestone for proposing a robust policy for Early Childhood Education and Care. In such cases cross-country comparisons might be more useful. There could be comparisons with trends in policy making in the USA or UK, comparison with neighbours such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, or comparison of language policies in other multilingual societies, etc. Of course, any comparison has certain limitations, but it could, nonetheless, be insightful.

A further level of analysis of a policy document could be an analysis of absences. One may call it reading between the lines and there can be many conjectures around omissions from policy documents. For example, there has been criticism against the government for the fact that the policy document does not mention Urdu directly though it mentions many other languages directly, even though the government has clarified that paras 4.12, 22.6 and 22.18 of NEP talk of all languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which includes Urdu. However, such conjectures and notions do shape the public discourse about the policy.

Moreover, if a policy is a political act, then, yet another intent of analysing a policy could be to explicate ideological underpinnings of policy proposals. In reference to policy making in India, one must reflect whether a policy document is in coherence with the Constitutional values and vision or not? Whether it promotes the spirit enshrined in the Directive Principles of the Constitution or not? Whether it strengthens public institutions or not? Does it empower people and fulfil the obligated duties of the state, such as Fundamental Rights? And whether it envisions a social transformation for all? Issues such as privatizations, inclusion, exam stress, assessment, high-stakes testing and transition from school education to higher education,

shadow education, provisions concerning Right to Education, and education of the marginalized could also be at the centre of analysis of an educational policy. Further, one may also reflect on the issues and challenges that might occur assuming that policy is implemented as it is, and which ambiguities, omissions, gaps of the policy document would hamper the implementation of the policy or the achievement of its vision statement. One may learn from the successes and failures of the implementation of similar policies in the past.

Considering the points discussed above, the proceeding articles in this section engage with different aspects of the National Education Policy-2020. Though most of the authors have picked their theme and title from the various chapters of the NEP-2020, however, they do not restrict themselves to either of these. The papers reflect the enmeshed nature of the various themes and highlight the interconnections between some of them. The papers include a discussion about the policy making process, the policy document, and the possible issues and challenges with its application and evaluation. To address the normative and ethical dimensions of a policy and its analysis, authors have variously referred to ideas such as MDGs, Right to Education, Diversity, Gender & Sexuality, Equity, Equality, Inclusion, and the other values enshrined in the Constitution of India.

The conviction behind this volume is that as teachers, teacher educators, and stakeholders affected by the educational policy, we must not refrain from thoroughly scrutinizing the policy documents and asking difficult questions because along with accountability of actions of policymakers, their answerability also needs to be ensured. Any policy document need not be directly implemented to test the strength of its recommendations, a thorough analysis of the document can provide us with a fair glimpse of the future of its recommendations. Such an engagement is an invitation to dialogue between multiple voices, positions, and perspectives around a shared concern.

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Salient Features of National Education Policy - 2020

Dr. Sushil Dhiman

Introduction

National Education Policy (NEP)2020 has been released by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt of India, on July 29,2020. It has four Sections :-

Part i—School Education

Part ii -- Higher Education

Part iii— Other key areas of focus

Part iv— Making it happen

The Introduction deals with the vision of the NEP, which is as follows :-

- Providing universal access to quality education
- Continuous ascent and leadership on the global stage – in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration and cultural preservation
- Universal high quality education, tap the talents, good of the individual, the society, country and the world

It is to be done in phased manner—goals to achieved till 2030, which are based on the lofty goals of 2015—Sustainable Development , which seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The fast changing world requires equally rapid changes to be incorporated in the knowledge landscape.

What does this changing landscape require?

- Scientific and technological development and its awareness all around
- Skilled workforce—skilled in mathematics, computer science, data science, multi-disciplinary abilities across science, social-sciences and humanities
- Awareness of environmental issues- water, electricity, pollution, depleting natural resources, food-scarcity, sanitation needs.
- New skilled labour- biology, chemistry, physics, agriculture, climate science, social science
- Multidisciplinary learnings

- Awareness of epidemics
- Children need to learn and also 'learn how to learn'
- Education to move towards less content and move towards—“how to think critically and solve problems , be creative, have multi-disciplinary knowledge, to innovate, adapt and absorb new material in novel and challenging fields.
- Education to become—more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible and enjoyable
- Curriculum should have – basic arts, crafts, games, humanities, sports and fitness, language, literature, culture, values, science and maths
- Education to become more well-rounded, useful and fulfilling to the learner
- Education to build character, enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, caring, and also be prepared for gainful, fulfilling employment
- The gap between current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged
- Major reforms required to bring highest quality, equity and integrity into the system from early childhood care education to the higher education
- An education system, second to none, to be acquired by 2040 [Long term goal]
- NEP is the first policy of 21st century [New Education Policy 1986/1992 was forward looking policy for 21st century]
- This policy proposes to revise and revamp all aspects of education – to create a new system that is aligned with aspirational goals of 21st century including SDG4—while building upon India's traditions and value system, especially in today's globalization era
- This NEP claims to lay special emphasis on the development of creative potential of every individual
- Stress is on fundamental literacy and numeracy, critical thinking and problem solving, and development of social, ethical and emotional capacities and dispositions

- This policy is guided by “heritage of ancient knowledge and thought
- Indian thought and philosophy is pursuit of jnana (knowledge), pragya (wisdom) and satya (truth)
- The aim of education in the past was not just acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life, life beyond schooling as well as complete realization and liberation of the self
- Ancient Indian Institutions—Nalanda, Takshila, Vikramshila etc. set very high standards of multidisciplinary teaching and research. Many renowned scholars of that era have made their mark in the world, in all fields of knowledge—medicine, sciences, astronomy, mathematics, economics, administration, metallurgy, surgery, civil engineering, architecture, navigation, yoga, fine arts, chess/games and many more fields of knowledge and philosophy
- India has rich legacies in all fields of knowledge and this must be nurtured and preserved and put to new uses through our education system
- Teachers who are at the centre of these foundational reforms in the education system, their role has been emphasized again
- Teachers must be empowered and helped to do their tasks effectively. Recruitment of the best teachers should be done
- The previous policies, especially the New Education Policy 1986/92, has been taken into consideration

All the above mentioned points form the first part of the NEP, give a mandate as to what is to be achieved via this NEP2020.

The National Education Policy must provide to all students-irrespective of their place of residence-quality education, especially for marginalised, disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Education is to become a leveler and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion and equality—so as to bring all groups of children under one ambit. All children must be provided all opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system.

Principles of the Policy

As the purpose of education is to develop good human beings, capable of rational thought and action, having all the qualities required to be a good human being—namely having compassion, empathy, courage, resilience, scientific temper, creative imagination with sound ethical moorings and values.

There is need for good institutions which will nurture and care for the child in a safe and stimulating environment, providing wide range of learning experiences in a well-caredfor environment with good infrastructure and ambience.

Reference

- National Education Policy - 2020 Document by MHRD

National Education Policy 2020: An Analytical Perspective

Geetika Datta

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the newly announced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with a critical perspective. The policy, though well-intentioned, very comprehensively written, recognising the importance of education in bringing about social justice and equality and striving to bring the yesteryears glory to India and India's Education system, does at places can go against these very ideals. As with a lot of other policy documents, the success or failure of this document also depends to a large extent on how it is implemented and how things actually transpire on ground.

Introduction

A policy on education at the national level is basically a philosophical framework which guides the direction of education across levels in the country for a considerable period of time. India, since its independence in 1947, has seen three policies in education i.e. National Policy on Education 1968, National Policy on Education 1986 and the newly launched National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which replaces the earlier Policy after a gap of 34 years. Policies on Education have been considered to be both educational and political statements of the government at the centre. The NEP 2020 was preceded by a Draft National Education Policy, 2019 shared by Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) which was open to public for their comments, opinions and suggestions. The Draft attracted responses and reactions from all sections of society. NEP 2020 has been formulated after an unprecedented process of consultation that involved nearly over 2 lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks, 6000 ULBs, 676 Districts under the Chairmanship of former cabinet secretary T S R Subramanian and eminent scientist K Kasturirangan,. The MHRD initiated an unprecedented collaborative, inclusive, and highly participatory consultation process from January 2015 (MHRD 2020).

After Independence, it has been an endeavour of every government to decolonize the Indian Education system and the NEP 2020 lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities (both foundational capacities and higher order capacities) but also social, ethical and emotional capacities and dispositions (NEP 2020). The Policy puts its vision on Page 6, as developing an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes

Dr. Geetika Datta: Principal, Bhavan's Leelavati Munshi College of Education, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi 110001.

directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. For realising its vision it has enlisted 22 fundamental principles which are listed in brief as follows:

1. Recognizing, identifying and fostering unique capabilities of each student
2. Achieving foundational literacy and numeracy
3. Flexibility-- in learning trajectories and programmes
4. No hard separations between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular, vocational and academic streams
5. Multidisciplinarity and holistic education
6. Emphasis on conceptual understanding
7. Creativity and critical thinking
8. Ethics and humane & Constitutional values
9. Promoting multilingualism and the power of language
10. Life skills
11. Focus on regular formative assessment for learning
12. Extensive use of technology
13. Respect for diversity and respect for the local context
14. Full equity and inclusion
15. Synergy in curriculum across all levels of education
16. Teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process
17. A 'light but tight' regulatory framework
18. Outstanding research
19. Continuous review of progress on sustained research and regular assessment
20. A rootedness and pride in India
21. Education is a public service
22. Substantial investment in a strong, vibrant public education system.

Since the announcement of the policy, there have been reactions from all over the country pertaining to various aspects of the policy-- both positive as well as negative. In the following pages an attempt is being made to critically analyse the various aspects of the policy.

The NEP 2020 overall is a futuristic, ambitious policy document which seeks to overhaul the Indian Education scenario and recommends significant structural changes at school as well as at the higher education level. It is a well-written document which conveys good intentions keeping in accordance with sound philosophical and psychological principles. It also connects itself with the earlier education policies and strives to take them further towards aims of attaining social justice and equality. One of main positives is that it is focused not just on access but on quality and delivery of content. The document also endeavours to attain the global education development agenda reflected in Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development adopted by India in 2015 to provide “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

The School Education

The Policy talks of universal access at all levels of school education to obtain quality, holistic education (including vocational education) with a shift from the present 10+2 system of school education to a new Pedagogical and Curricular structure comprising of 5+3+3+4 system with 5 years of Foundational stage comprising of 3 years of pre-school/ Anganwadi, 2 years of Classes 1 & 2, Classes 3 to 5 as Preparatory, Classes 6 to 8 as Middle and Classes 9 to 12 as Secondary. The Policy also lays adequate stress on Early Childhood Care and Education and brings it under the ambit of formal schooling. It recognizes the importance of stimulation of brain in early years starting from age 3 onwards and stresses on the need for Preparatory class with ECCE qualified teachers in Anganwadis which will be attained by giving a 6 months training programme in ECCE for 10+2 teachers and one year diploma programme for teachers with lower qualifications. But it does not talk of recognizing the status and remuneration of Anganwadi workers as formal teachers and there is a huge discrepancy in the salary structures as compared to school teachers, which is highly unfair. The Policy also talks of holistic development of learners, reduce curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking, experiential learning and flexibility in course choices. The Policy also talks of reforms in the assessments of students with focus on regular and competency based formative assessments, which give multidimensional 360-degree reports on progress of students on all the three domains -- much needed reforms- provided the implementation is as effective as the intent on papers.

Teachers– Recruitment, Deployment, Service Environment, Professional Development and Career Development

The Policy recognises the role of teachers in the lives of students, lays focus on attracting outstanding students to enter the profession through a 4 year integrated B.Ed. programme. It talks of raising the standards of entrants in the field through strengthened Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs), scholarships, conducive environment in schools, promotional schemes. One of the very welcome steps is recognizing the role of teachers working at each and every level i.e. Foundational, Preparatory, Middle and Secondary. The policy talks of “career progression-related incentive to move from being teachers in early stages to later stages or vice versa” and recognises the fact that all stages of school education requires highest-quality teachers and all stages are equally important; a very welcome recommendation, as compared to prevalent

practices of having newly recruited teachers to be working at primary levels (with whatsoever no formal training or orientation) and as they gain experience, they move to teaching higher classes. The Policy also talks of a merit based structure of tenure, promotion and salary structure, but is silent on how this “merit based” structure will be defined and implemented. Given the present scenario, our education system is not starting from a scratch, so it is going to be extremely challenging to implement these well-intentioned reforms.

Everybody recognises the importance of good teachers for a country, but will the 4-year B.Ed. programme be able to attract talented students in the field, is highly debatable and there have been no studies to prove the effectiveness of a 4 year programme vis-à-vis a two year programme. Another very important determinant of a field attracting talented people is the remuneration and other perks. Teaching, is decently rewarding for people working in the governmental sector and few other institutions in the private sector. But the bulk of teachers working in the private sector are underpaid, exploited with poor working environment and advances for future growth. All of these factors are not going to change overnight with the coming of the policy. The school managements have been consistently raising their concerns about highly regulated procedures and fee structures which make them starved on funds to pay as per the government pay scales; thereby leading to malpractices and exploitation of teachers in varied ways. The Policy talks about giving recognition, salary raises and promotions to teachers doing outstanding work; and the parameters on which 'outstanding work' is going to be decided, will be decided by National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), to be prepared by 2022. Different teachers in the country are working in varied diverse conditions with different kinds of challenges and difficulties, and working with children with diverse backgrounds and capabilities. Are these parameters going to be same for all teachers, needs deliberations. Also the kind of documentation work which is expected out of them generally has been taking precedence over the actual teaching work. Keeping in mind the pressures, challenges which teachers already face, accountability issues (too much or too little), preparing them for the overhaul of the system with high morale will be a challenging task. In order to fructify this policy, the country requires teachers who are highly motivated, conscious of their roles in building a nation and future generations, both in quantity and quality, which requires superhuman efforts in In-service teacher education in sensitizing and preparing for the future

Multilingualism and the Power of Language

The section on Multilingualism has generated maximum reactions from people from all

sections of Indian society. The Policy talks of promotion of all Indian languages including the classical languages (special focus on Sanskrit) which are mentioned in Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, investment in large number of language teachers in all regional languages, which is a very welcome step. The Three Language formula continues to be implemented but the Policy makes it clear that no language will be imposed on any state; with the rider that 'so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India'. This step is likely to lead to protection and promoting the linguistic diversity of our country; which is the need of the hour. However, the Policy also talks of “*wherever possible*, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 but preferably till Grade 8 will be home/ mother tongue/ local language”. Whereas, it has recognised the importance of Psychological phenomenon of Language Acquisition during 2 to 8 years of age, wherein children are able to acquire not just one or two but at times three or four languages at the same time, but the emphasis seems to be placed on giving more importance to the local language only. Trend reports of past decades show that people are increasingly taking out their children from the government school systems to private 'English medium' schools since proficiency in English is considered to be an important factor for gaining employment and upward social mobility. An increased emphasis on the local language 'wherever possible' may lead to adoption of local language by government schools and not the private schools (as per the demands of the parents). This can have huge implication for the extremely poor and marginalized sections of the society, and the disparity between them, in all probability is likely to go up. Though the policy is heavily loaded with ideology of promotion of Indian languages but this 'wherever possible' clause might lead to maintaining and, in fact, reinforcing the already existing gaps between the 'privileged English speaking' Indians and 'non-English speakers', as a result the English-medium schools will continue as they are and in fact more of them will sprout. Keeping in mind the innate abilities of human to acquire languages during 2 to 8 years of age, it is required that the children should be exposed to 2-3 languages including English during this time period by way of simple sentences, poems, stories etc. so that they do not have problem, while learning the languages later on. Another initiative that the Policy talks about is the fun activity/ project '*Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat*' to be done by students of classes 6 to 8; which is to be non-evaluative in nature. Given the psyche of teachers, students and their parents; anything which does not carry marks/ grades is not worth doing; this might run into rough weather. A very positive step is the stress given to Indian Sign Language (ISL) to be standardized across the country.

Equitable and Inclusive Education

The Policy strives to attain social justice and equality through education for the benefit of

Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) categories based on gender identities (particularly female and transgenders), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and Minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities) and socio-economic conditions (such as migrants and victims of trafficking, children of victims of trafficking, child beggars etc.). For facilitating these categories the policy has advocated creating Special Education Zones (SEZs) where all the schemes and policies are implemented for large populations belonging to educationally disadvantaged sections of society, which is debatable. However, the Policy is silent about the criteria to be considered for declaring a zone to be SEZ, which will result in huge discrepancy in facilitations provided to SEDGs in SEZs and other regions since SEDGs are spread across all over the country.

The policy takes into cognizance the various types of school systems operating in our country i.e. the government schools, the private schools, the aided schools, international schools, special category of government schools like Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Kendriya Vidyalayas etc. The Policy highlights the strengthening of the above mentioned special category of government schools for bringing about equitable education for all. But the issue of 'Common School/ Neighborhood School', which the previous policies also have been talking about, has been ignored here. When there is already so much diversity between the government and private schools, the efforts to create so much discrepancy between categories of government schools is highly questionable. Does that mean that only these special schools should be responsible for all good work to be done in government schools? These measures, in themselves, may create lot of inequalities in our overall school system. As it is in our society, government schools are catering to students from disadvantaged sections and creating more segregations within the government system, will further strengthen inequalities and legitimize the popular perception about the non-efficacy of government school education.

Higher Education

The Policy highlights the major problems faced by the Indian Higher Education system and thereafter presents its vision as complete overhauling and re-energising of the higher education system to deliver high-quality higher education with equity and inclusion; which is full of good intentions. The main focus on the Policy is towards creating large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one Higher Education Institution (HEI) in every district, offering multidisciplinary undergraduate education with medium of instruction being local/Indian languages, faculty and institutional autonomy, revamping

curriculum, funding of peer-reviewed research, governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards and 'light but tight' regulation. All the recommendations mentioned are ambitious and note worthy, but the road map to attain these has not been made very clear in the policy. The policy mentioned that our higher education system is marred by a 'severely fragmented system, with less emphasis on cognitive skills and learning outcomes, rigid separation of disciplines with early specialization, limited teacher and institutional autonomy and many more'. But how this humongous reform process is going to be shaped up and how people involved are going to be prepared is not specifically laid out. We already have a higher education system in place, the success or failure of this policy is going to be dependent on how restructuring and streamlining of the entire system is done; which is not discussed in detail. The word 'multidisciplinary' is repeated quite a lot in the policy with 'multidisciplinary undergraduate education' and large 'multidisciplinary institutions and universities'. Creating at least one such institution in every district of the country and having courses and material in all local/ Indian languages is again a very challenging task.

The policy also advocates giving autonomy to colleges by phasing out the system of 'affiliated colleges' over a period of fifteen years and having a 'light but tight' regulated by a single regulator. Understanding the dynamics of Higher Education in India especially with the share of private sector, is a staggering 78% (AISHE 2017-18 data). There have been concerns raised over the high instances of commercialisation and mal-practices in higher education by the private sector, giving full autonomy may be a contentious idea, giving impetus to complete commercialisation in the higher education sector. Also the idea of inviting foreign universities has been raising concerns by different strata, wherein it is being speculated that the top league universities may not be interested in setting up their centers in India, and not so good, commercial universities may attract students and drain financial resources of the country.

The policy points out that a HEI is known by its faculty since faculty is the backbone of higher education. Having the right content knowledge is important, but equally important is the pedagogy / Andragogy aspect. But it is seen that pedagogues in various academic and professional higher education courses are not oriented towards basics of Andragogy. Therefore the faculty, though knowledgeable may not be able to make a connect with their students; thereby impeding a good educational environment and nurturing future talent. This NEP 2020 is silent on this issue of preparing the HE teachers for their job. Various short-time courses or Orientation programmes, specially based on Andragogy and use of innovative approaches to teaching should be taken up at regular intervals so that teachers, in various higher education institutions, are able to make use of innovative approaches like Peer Learning, Collaborative

and Cooperative Learning, Group and Individual based Projects and Problem solving, use of ICT (including MOOCs and OERs) and its tools effectively. Only an orientation towards innovative teaching would not be sufficient, equally important are processes of Assessments. Innovative methods of teaching combined with assessments via traditional testing modes will result into disastrous consequences. Use of ICT, which was considered to be an egalitarian practice few years back, now, because of COVID 19 crisis has become essential and need of the hour. Therefore, in order to realise the vision of the policy, it is extremely important that the most important factor, which decides the success or failure of any educational programme, i.e. the teachers/ faculty are duly oriented; especially since NEP 2020 is looking at dynamically changing the entire landscape of higher education.

Research is a very important component both for an institution of higher education and also for people engaged in the field of higher education. In fact an institution is known by its faculty and the kind of research which is coming out of it. At present, Central Universities, State Universities and Institutions of Eminence do have funds to promote and undertake research, but in other Higher Education Institutions (HEI), especially the self-financing and Private Universities, there is acute shortage of funds for research. NEP 2020 has also highlighted the issue of lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines, as one of the primary issues that Indian higher education system is facing. For faculty, working in these HEI generally, it is left to their own initiative and their own resources, which cannot be sufficient so they are not in a position to invest and pursue researches even when there is a will. And there is generally no support system to help them out. Most of the present government schemes funded by national agencies like UGC, CSIR, AICTE, AYUSH, DBT, DSIR, ICSSR etc. give research grants to individuals affiliated to government institutions or institutions which come under Section 2(f) and 12 (B) of UGC Act. This leaves faculty, affiliated to private institutions (which are a huge majority), mostly out of the purview of research funding. The question which arises is that if the Government of India has set up a proportion of fund for encouragement of quality research, the main criteria for deciding on granting of the assistance should be the soundness or relevance of the research proposal rather than the affiliation of the researcher. Why should it be given only to people working in public-funded organisations? This is an issue which requires deliberation and is an embodiment of 'Exclusion' of a different type at the policy level. NPE 2020 has stressed on setting up of a National Research Foundation (NRF) to facilitate research in all areas by providing 'a reliable base of merit-based but equitable peer-reviewed research funding, helping to develop a culture of research in the country through suitable incentives for

and recognition of outstanding research, and by undertaking major initiatives *to seed and grow research at State Universities and other public institutions* where research capability is currently limited'. Therefore, in the NEP 2020, the stress is on funding of researches only in public institutions and leaving private or self-financing institutions totally out of the purview (which at present is at a staggering 78% as already mentioned above).

In order to curb commercialisation of education, the policy advocates that 'private HEIs having a philanthropic and public-spirited intent' will be encouraged through a progressive regime of fees determination. The 'not for profit' model is also drawing a lot of flak given the proportion of private players in the field, since this has led to lot of malpractices and ultimately result in overall exploitation of teachers. The policy is positive towards recognising education as a vehicle for attaining social justice. But the present fee structures do not provide for practical functioning of private unaided institutions in an ethical manner. The basic bottom line should be that fee structures of the colleges should be designed in such a manner that an equilibrium is maintained between the HEIs becoming self-sustaining at least on the operating expenses and day to day expenses like covering of prescribed salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff and other operational and/or maintenance expenses and not being operated for commercial interests. The policy needs to acknowledge the importance of 'surplus' for any institution and must provide avenues so that each and every HEI grows into bigger multidisciplinary institution as envisaged by the policy and is able to provide good education to the future generations of the country.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the NEP 2020 is a highly ambitious policy in terms of its vision and recommended structures in School, Higher, Technical, Professional or Vocational education. Most of the intent contained in the policy has positive connotations. But the success will depend on the way the policy is actually transacted on ground. Our earlier policies also have been very good on paper, but implementations have been deficient in many ways. We, as citizens of the country, can keep our fingers crossed for this policy to transpire on ground the way it is intended to be.

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Inclusion of all? Looking through the New Educational Policy, 2020

Shivam Luthra

Abstract

The Indian educational system is finally about to get reformed after a long period of more than 30 years. These 30 years have witnessed several significant changes in the educational scenario. These include the advent of pedagogical practices that must be inclusive. The National Education Policy 2020 has come up with several ways and strategies, to provide equal educational opportunities to all, with a special emphasis on the children who have been marginalized in the past due to several reasons such as caste, class, region, religion, gender, physical and mental abilities and needs etc., However, India has a long history of exclusion and segregation of numerous children from the educational institutions and thus the task to include everyone in the educational practices is a huge challenge. Hence, this paper is an attempt to view the National Education Policy 2020 through a critical lens of inclusion and analysing to what extent the policy is inclusive and its shortcomings, if any.

Keywords: Inclusion, Exclusion, Segregation, Equity, Justice, Socio-Economic Disadvantageous Groups, School Education, Higher Education.

Introduction

The initial year of the third decade of the 21st century has brought a huge number of changes in everyone's life. One such change has been brought in the education field, which is now a fundamental right of every child between the age range of 3 to 18 years and hence concerns everyone. The National Education Policy was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29th July 2020 and now the prime focus has shifted to its implementation. Multiple new changes are being proposed by the policy. It has laid significant emphasis on ensuring the inclusion of all learners at school as well as at the higher educational level with a goal to accomplish it by 2040. The NEP 2020 states, "the global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030." (National Education Policy 2020, p. 3)

The use of the term 'Inclusion' can be traced back to the Draft of Inclusive Education Scheme, MHRD, 2003, and to the National Curriculum Framework. While the former focuses on the education of all the diverse learners in the situation when everyone learns together, the latter states that all good practices of teaching are practices of inclusion. (National Curriculum Framework, 2005, p. 84). However, it is really important to understand what understanding of inclusion the document carries? Even then, NEP 2020 has two dedicated units focusing on inclusion, one in Part I-- School Education, naming-- 'Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All' (pp. 24-27) and the other in Part II --Higher Education naming 'Equity and

Shivam Luthra M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

Inclusion in Higher Education' (pp. 41-44). These units are required to be analysed, in order to get the specific details of what explanation of inclusion the document is considering.

The NEP, 2020 adopts the definition of Inclusive Education from the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 that defines Inclusive Education as a 'system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities'(NEP 2020, p. 26). However, before understanding what Inclusive Education would mean, it is necessary to understand what does the term 'inclusion' in the first place mean. As per Enslin & Hedge (2010), concepts of inclusion and diversity have been the focus of some of the most consistently fraught normative issues in education, implicated in wider concepts like equity, fairness, and justice. Thus, these concepts are required to be understood first to understand the concept of inclusion.

There are as many as four different philosophical traditions of justice that Ruitenberg & Vokey (2010) talk about, namely, justice as harmony, justice as equality, justice as equity, and justice as difference.

The concept of Justice as Harmony arises from Plato's *The Republic* (Ruitenberg & Vokey, 2010, p. 3). It is based, on the assumption, that every person in the world is born with different talents. To make the society stronger, everyone should take up the role that is most aligned with their natural talent and this act of playing the best-suited role has been considered as the justice to the person. Thus, people are being considered as unequal. It has been also mentioned that people who have different talents, education should support these natural talents. Thus, society will become stronger if it fosters the excellence of people. Where this idea falls short is in its assertion that people are unequal only based on their birth, but at the same time arguing that their talents are not equally valued which creates a hierarchy as per the talents. This in itself, is a form of inequality as people are not only made different, based on these values but some are also considered to be superior to others. In all the concepts of Plato, as well as of Strauss, the idea of inequality and well-being of society take away an individual's freedom to choose an education and career path (Ruitenberg & Vokey, 2010, p. 4).

The second one, i.e. Justice as Equality, is given by Kant. It considers equality as the source of achieving justice (Ruitenberg & Vokey, 2010, p. 4). As per Kant, Justice is achieved when people act in accordance with 'Categorical Imperatives', and these imperatives hold for all human beings, as all human beings are rational. He believes that all human beings are not the same, but they are equally deserving of respect. Also, as rational beings, they are equally

responsible for using their reason. Thus, Kant's idea favours both rewards and punishments for human beings as they are rational and thus, responsible for their actions.

While talking about Justice as Difference, Levinas argues that all other concepts of justice such as justice as harmony, justice as equality, justice as equity are based on one or other ontological assumptions and thus he questions the compulsion of basing the idea of justice on ontological assumptions, as for him, it is the ethics that precedes ontology. From this, he means that the answers related to human beings can only be answered ethically. This considers a singular other as a different identity, where different means absolute alterity. Thus, justice seeks to consider others as entirely different.

While justice as equality demands equal treatment for all, Justice as Equity is concerned with equality of educational opportunity for all (Ruitenber & Vokey, 2010, p. 5). Thus, the idea of justice as equity, sounds more egalitarian as its purpose is to reduce all inequalities. Those who favour this concept i.e. justice as equity believe that redressing the inequalities by them is not justifiable specifically because the one who would redress the inequalities has not faced the issues related to those inequalities themselves as they are out of the sphere of people who are, in reality, facing them (Ruitenber & Vokey, 2010, p. 5). For instance, contemporary Indian classrooms are often occupied by different generation learners. Classroom space would be shared by first-generation learners, second-generation learners, and sometimes, also, third-generation learners. Some will argue that as all of these learners study in the same school, same class and are taught by the same teachers, so justice would be to have the same test from them and assessing them on the same assessing criterion. But keeping this diversity of being different generation learners in mind along with all the other diversities such as caste, class, region, religion, ability, etc. which Indian society has, this would not be justice as per the concept of justice as equity.

A good way of achieving justice as equity is given by Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice* (Ruitenber & Vokey, 2010, p. 6). According to him, each person should get equal rights, and all the basic liberties compatible with a similar system. He argues for arranging social and economic inequalities in such a way that the greatest benefit is taken by the disadvantaged groups.

Thus, the definition being used by NEP 2020 to explain inclusive education is more inclined towards the concept of Justice as Equity as it talks about using various pedagogical styles to meet the needs of different learners. For instance, the document says that new scholarships will be launched for various learners belonging to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged

Groups (SEDGs). Also, transportation facilities such as bicycle will be provided to the learners for reaching the school. This also suggests the inter-relationship between justice, equity and fairness as per which fairness is considered to have occurred when justice is based on the idea of equity. Let us now try to find out to what extent the NEP, 2020 has been trying to make the Indian education system inclusive.

Including Everyone

The National Education Policy 2020 seeks -- ensuring the inclusion of everyone in the educational system, both in terms of school education and higher education (NEP 2020, p. 24). The key focus of the policy with reference to inclusion, seems to be on the people who have been discriminated continuously and have faced certain challenges throughout their lives; and education has been seen as the most relevant and efficient tool that can counter discrimination and bring justice to all. Thus, as per the policy, the justice for these learners who had been discriminated, seeks to ensure equity to all i.e. ensuring equality of educational opportunities to all where the prime concern is to make sure that everyone can access, participate, and get learning opportunities. These groups majorly include Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) which consist of various gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions (NEP 2020, p. 24).

Until this point, the policy might seem or sound inclusive as it mentions and tries to explain the challenges and needs of almost all the diverse groups and also provides sufficient data related to the challenges that they have faced, and also that they are still facing. Also, it takes into account the contemporary postmodernist view that different people have different pasts and their past impacts their present as it shows different data and list of specific challenges faced by people of diverse backgrounds, thus leading to different sets of needs for getting and feeling included in the educational processes. These descriptions are being followed by several measures to ensure that everyone gets education and have justice in the form of equality of opportunities. But whether the policy is actually inclusive or not in its nature, is more than this as a mere mention of various groups and their challenges does not make any policy inclusive.

A policy, in itself, can not be considered entirely inclusive if it only talks about the diverse needs of diverse people, rather it must talk about how to implement, as it is easier said than done. It is necessary to explain that how the policy would be implemented as learners can even get integrated,excluded or segregated, if there be loopholes or errors in the implementation. NEP 2020 does identify various challenges and issues that need to be taken care of, for ensuring inclusion of all. These include lack of access to quality schools, poverty, social mores

& customs, and language. (NEP 2020, p. 25) While it does mention what is required to be done, in case of most of the issues around inclusion, it falls short when it comes to explaining what would be the process of it and how will it ensure the same. Unless a plan of action gets introduced, the policy can not be considered complete in itself and one can argue that the policy has a set of innumerable problems and insignificant claims to resolve them with the same argument that it is more difficult to do than to talk. Special emphasis has been put on various Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), in order to include them in educational institutions. The various ways essential for everyone, in the policy, consist of fee waivers, counsellings, creation of special education zones, putting required intervention wherever required, planning learning outcomes, and building special mechanisms for tribal students, etc.

To ensure gender inclusion, attention has been laid on the safety and rights of different genders, reducing gender gaps with special focus on girl children. Work has been planned among various stages for ensuring the inclusion of children with special needs. The planning covers the preparation of children with special needs enabled education, ensuring their participation in regular schools, facilitating them with technological supports, developing special models for them, the formation of schools having alternative teaching pedagogies, etc. It is evident that ample work has been done to identify various needs and challenges of diverse groups on the part of the policy makers to make inclusion certain.

Inclusion or Something Else?

Although the policy dedicates two of its units to ensure that inclusion of all, the policy has wide loopholes and has ignored various factors that would be essential for ensuring inclusion. For instance, the policy does talk about reducing the dropout rates of the learners and bringing the learners who have dropped out already back to school (NEP 2020, p. 10). On the other hand, nothing has been mentioned in respect of the children who have never attended a formal school. Does this mean that as per the policy the Universalization of Elementary Education has been achieved 100% in India and there is not even a single child who is not attending school? Also, as they talk about bringing dropouts back to school, is just bringing one back to school inclusion? The same is true for higher education as all the policy has mentioned is ensuring that children come to higher educational institutions and nothing else has got any emphasis. The challenges of inclusion that arise only after a child starts attending an educational institution in terms of getting included in the teaching-learning transact, space in which it would feel included, need more focus than that which has been already given. Moving further,

the policy identifies infrastructure as the major reason of learners' dropouts and discuss less about the issues such as school environment, poverty, lack of minimal life support necessities such as food and clothing, that contribute in learners' dropping out to a large extent. This, for sure, will not be having a large impact in terms of drop out rates as the reasons behind dropping out of school are many and not just infrastructure. This, instead, may result in the exclusion of innumerable learners who have been excluded till date.

There would be hardly any citizen of India unaware of the linguistic diversity present in our country. NEP 2020, like most of the other policies, comes up with yet another way to take up various languages in the school as well as in higher educational institutions. For schools, it states, that the medium of instruction in elementary classes should be the mother tongue or the local language of the learners. (NEP 2020, p. 13) There can be one assumption behind this recommendation and that would be the consideration that all the learners in a classroom will be aware of at least one language efficiently, one language common among all the learners of that particular classroom. But, in reality,, this might not be the scenario especially in urban cities as they offer pull factors to the inhabitants of other places. Thus, the implementation of this may lead to the exclusion of the diverse language of the learners of the primary level. Or, Will the schools be allotted on the basis of languages of the learners to have learners with the same language in each and every school? There is a threat of segregation and exclusion of the languages of learners who come from migrant families and have a different language than the school language scenario. At the higher education level, it states that the use of various Indian languages will be promoted as the medium of instructions or teaching-learning would take place bilingually. This, again, will lead to the exclusion of many, especially foreign students, who would not be able to understand and relate wherever the medium of the transaction would be an Indian language, or maybe different arrangements would be done for the inclusion of foreign learners studying in Indian colleges. Similarly, ambiguity lies when it says that teaching-learning can take place bilingually as whether the second language is going to be English, has not been specified anywhere.

Inclusive Online Education

Early Childhood Care and Education have been the area of the prime focus of the NEP 2020 and several new recommendations have been introduced and are being considered as inclusive. (NEP 2020, p. 11). As the policy also puts specific emphasis on enhancing the online education system, nothing has been told about how physical and motor skills of the learners enrolled in the primary classes would be developed through online mode in equivalence to the

offline mode, and what about the learning that is accommodated using the manipulation of the objects in the surroundings. All the learners do not have the same resources available at home and thus this might lead to segregation or exclusion of the learners from the teaching-learning process. Similarly, this makes even the accessibility of DIKSHA i.e. Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing questionable because whether it would actually lead to sharing of knowledge is not certain and numerous learners with lack of resources or prior technological knowledge might feel left out. Seems like the policy is silent about these issues.

Promoting online mode of education, the policy claims that specific emphasis should be laid on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes offered by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and claims that it will lead to learning opportunities for all including learners who belong to various socio-economically disadvantaged group. (NEP 2020, p. 10) Here, we are talking about a country where learners have even committed suicide because of their inability to afford a smartphone for attending online classes. (**Unable To Get Smartphone For Online Class, Woman Dies By Suicide In Bengal, n.d.**) The claim that online education would lead to educational opportunities for all might end up in nothing else but in creating a false consciousness among the people of the country that will lead to yet another layer of discrimination of the learners who already belong to marginalized groups. Thus, more emphasis would be required on the quality enhancement of NIOS and similar institutions especially in terms of the current issues related to online education.

New Structures, New Recommendations and Inclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 also comes up with a new structure for schools corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. (NEP 2020, p. 11) However, nothing has been mentioned in relation to the provisions that the policy would follow for learners with special needs. Whether it will continue as per the provisions of the Right of Children with Disability Act 2016 or would they also follow the new pattern, has not been clearly stated. For instance, while the RTE talks about age-appropriate classrooms, there are special provisions for the learners with special needs and thus, a learner with intellectual disability of age 17 will be allowed to attend class 9 in regular schools. On the other hand, nothing much has been explained in the NEP 2020. This has led to the creation of a vacant hole that may lead to the exclusion of the learners with special needs. Why the policy has not talked about the learners with special needs in this regard is highly questionable. Also, the use of the term 'wherever possible' has often been used. The concern here is, the uncertainty with this term can be used to justify the failure of the implementation of the policy in the future. Thus,

the policy itself seems to give space to discrimination of various already disadvantaged groups.

As the policy hardly explains the importance of inclusive pedagogical practices that are indeed necessary for ensuring inclusion, it also promotes the existence of schools that offer their traditional or alternative pedagogical style. Thus, the policy ensures that such institutions flourish without even considering that this might also lead to exclusion or segregation of the learners as whether the practices of such schools are even inclusive, has not been given any importance. The policy might need to reflect more on existence of schools offering alternate pedagogical style in, or to make certain that, these pedagogic styles be inclusive.

Several new ways of achieving inclusion have also been introduced by the policy. One such way is the introduction of the inclusion fund. (NEP 2020, p. 26) Inclusion funds, as per the policy, will be introduced to provide equitable quality education to all learners who belong to various Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). But, like many other new introductions to make education inclusive nothing else has been shared about this. How the fund would be regulated; what would be the way of distributing and utilizing the fund; how the utilization of funds would ensure equity, are some questions that need an answer. The same is true for the funds that will be generated for the education of SEDGs in higher education as per the policy (NEP 2020, p. 41). Although this leads to a far grim picture in terms of higher education as it already has a lack of government-run institutions and the policy doesn't seem to say anything about whether these funds would be provided to the learners enrolled in private higher educational institutions or not.

Yet another new way given by the policy is the introduction of school complexes meant to generate resources and integrate the learners with special needs but like the previous one, whether these complexes would be able to cater to the needs of diverse learners, is not clear (NEP 2020, p. 26-27). For instance, this might result in lack of sufficient resources at one particular place and instead, it might lead to the segregation and exclusion of learners in desperate needs of the same. While the idea is to ensure availability of resources at all the places in a specific complex, how things and resources would be managed, need further consideration. Similarly, while the policy does mention that the technology-based assistance will be provided to the parents, it does not say anything about providing technical resources to the learners who can not afford it. Providing technical assistance to the parents who do not even have enough money to buy any such device, in itself would be a discriminatory practice. What would be the benefit of giving technical assistance to the people who do not own any

smart device, are incapable in purchasing one or are illiterate. Wouldn't this result in generation of feelings of lack in oneself? Yet another new recommendation of the policy consists of a special scholarship that will be awarded to learners belonging to various SEDGs who would showcase meritorious talents. (NEP 2020, p. 27-28) This idea, if implemented, will not only lead to enhancement of already existing competitiveness and reduce the scope of cooperation among the learners but also marginalize various learners on the basis of their performance.

Numerous researches in the past have acknowledged the very fact that the performance of the learners gets affected by their socio-economic circumstances and thus selecting just a few of them for the scholarship isn't justifiable and the discrimination that they have faced because of their caste, religion and other similar factors leading to their underachievement must not be a way to segregate them from those who are not underachievers. The policy also has a clause which states that bridge courses should be developed for students who belong to disadvantaged educational backgrounds. (NEP 2020, p. 27-28, 42) This, again, gives rise to several questions such as till what age and till which class bridge courses would be provided, who would be considered as a student coming from a disadvantageous educational background. For instance, are the learners who have done their graduation and post-graduation from open learning institutions going to be considered as belonging to this group or not when they would try to get admission to a Ph.D. program? It might seem that, yes, they are included but are they actually considered similar in equivalence to the learners who have done their higher education from regular institutions in practice and for Ph.D. admissions. This again gives rise to the need of a plan of action as soon as possible. The parameters for this criterion might be required to be redesigned especially for calling it inclusive.

Adding on to the wide range of recommended changes and modifications, the National Education Policy 2020 says that home-based education should be an available choice to the learners with special needs who can not go to schools. (NEP 2020, p. 27) However, to ensure that this feature of the education is inclusive, it is really necessary to answer whether this facility is present to all the learners with special needs or only to them who can afford to get education within the walls of their home. If this facility is subject to affordability then it will fail to make education inclusive and if the expenses of home-based education will be taken care of by the government then shouldn't this feature be applicable to those learners too who can't afford to go to schools because of the financial and other related issues.

Some more issues can also be highlighted in the policy. It recommends the formation of an

inclusive admission process and curriculum for the higher education level (NEP 2020, p. 42). On the other hand, it does not touch upon the ways in which this goal would be achieved. It also says that buildings will be constructed in such a way that they will be wheelchair accessible. (NEP 2020, p. 42) But more emphasis is required on how such learners are going to reach these educational buildings.

An important feature of the National Education Policy 2020 is that it provides learners multiple exit points in higher education systems. The learners can exit whenever they would need to with certain benefits from all exit points, i.e. they can exit at the end of either first year, or second year, or third year or fourth year. (NEP 2020, p. 37) The policy might create an addition in the list of exclusion by focusing on multiple exits. This would be used in justifying how the dropout rates of the institutions have been reduced and the policy is succeeding in the sense that learners are not actually dropping out and instead are taking the advantages of multiple exits available. But, in reality, this system might lead to the addition of yet another layer of oppression of the learners belonging to marginalized groups without even making them realize that they are being marginalized by creating false consciousness as they would be enjoying their early exit thinking that now they have been provided with more choices and opportunities.

The Advantageous Groups

Not only the disadvantageous groups but the policy also forms a vacuole that would lead to discrimination of the learners who belong to socio-economical advantageous groups. This is because the policy doesn't discuss anything in depth about the inclusion of the learners who belong to the advantageous groups and the challenges they might face, would it be able to include the learners belonging to these groups? For instance, the policy suggests that suitable counselling will be provided to learners of SEDGs, specially learners with disadvantaged educational backgrounds, who would be in need of support but nothing much has been mentioned for learners who don't belong to SEDGs. Are learners belonging to these groups fully responsible for themselves to get included in the various educational processes? Even if they have all the resources to access school, is inclusion only about attending and getting access to a school? The strategies required to make pedagogical methods of teaching inclusive have been almost ignored by the policy, except the mentioning of experiential based learning for all. The inclusion does not stop once all the learners reach the classroom. The classroom practices and environment have to be inclusive too and needs of all the learners are required to be taken care of too. The policy also mentions the need for change in school culture.(NEP

2020, p. 28). But nothing specific has been said beyond that, that would clarify the related process. Even when it talks about changing the curriculum and introducing a new one, it does not discuss anything in relation to making teaching-learning process inclusive. Where it can fall short is that curriculum is going to be transacted to learners through teachers, i.e. syllabus as well as the books would have a perspective in them, it is the role of a teacher to sensitize the learners and this is where the real challenge lies. Yes, the needs of the marginalized are different and important. But, aren't there any needs for learners belonging to advantageous groups? Is the current system of education already inclusive for them in every aspect and hence no improvement is required? The answer is rather different and a deep reflective study along with vital emphasis on implementations of the suggestions given after the study is required for ensuring inclusion of all.

Some Other Concerns

Despite the fact, that the National Education Policy 2020 has tried to have an inclusive approach towards educational availability and access, especially for SEDGs, it has remained silent on innumerable topics and concerns. In particular, children with special needs have been considered as a part of a bigger umbrella of SEDGs and no specific attention has been shown towards their needs. On the other hand, it does not say anything regarding the inclusion of a teacher in the educational institutions and this might lead to several issues. For instance, the teachers who work as Adhocs and do not find themselves included in the system would be held responsible for sensitizing others and making educational practices inside the institutions inclusive. The policy hardly talks about the mental health of the learners. At the same time, it continuously emphasizes the importance of counsellors and NGO works as if they are already present in ample numbers. There are multiple other topics on which nothing has been written such as secularism, socialism, the inclusion of Bengali and Urdu languages, or about the future of distance and open education at the higher education level. It is hard to believe that the policy is inclusive and is trying to generate equality of opportunities for all.

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Online and Digital Education- NEP 2020

Aarushi Batra

Abstract

One of the key features articulated in the policy's vision is online and digital education. There is a strong relationship between the current COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of online education as a mode of teaching-learning process in the policy. Moreover, the policy claims that online education and the use of technology would improve the overall educational processes and outcomes. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss and analyze the section on online and digital education in the policy concerning themes like adopting the digital mode, digital divide, teacher-student interaction in online mode, creation of e-content and health hazards related to online education.

Keywords: Online Education, Technology, Digital Divide, Teacher-Student Interaction, e-Content, Health Hazards

Introduction

“ While education will play a critical role in this transformation, technology itself will play an important role in the improvement of educational processes and outcomes; thus, the relationship between technology and education (at all levels) is bi-directional (NEP 2020, Section 23.1). ”

After almost three decades, a new policy on education has come into existence and one of the key features that has been articulated in this policy's vision is- Online Education. PM Narendra Modi, on May 1, 2020, after reviewing the policy, declared that online education would be the core of NEP 2020 aimed at making India a **“global knowledge superpower”** (Sadgopal, 2020, August 1).

If we compare NEP 2020 with the previous policies on education in India, then one would find that the use of technology and online education is one of the significant and newest aspects that has been constantly expressed in the new policy. Draft NEP 2019 did talk about technology and 21st-century skills related to it here and there, however, unlike the final version of the policy, it did not have a chapter or section (pp. 56-60) dedicated specifically to online education and technology integration.

It seems that the current circumstances that we are in, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has pushed the entire country to switch to an online mode of education for which we were not prepared. Face to face interaction got replaced by virtual interaction and both students and teachers had to reimagine a new scenario of teaching-learning processes.

Aarushi Batra M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

aarushibatra26@gmail.com

The policy also acknowledged the recent rise in pandemic and the need to adopt alternative modes of quality education when traditional or in-person modes of education are not possible (p. 58). Hence, there seems to be a strong relation between our current circumstances due to the pandemic and the introduction of the section on Online Education. It was a last-minute addition in the policy which took place without any public feedback or parliamentary discussion (Sadgopal, 2020, August 1). In this paper, an attempt has been made to thematically discuss and analyze the section on online and digital education of the policy.

Digital India- Taking the Online Route

The new education policy asserts that technology will play a crucial role in impacting education; both in its processes and outcomes. With the evolution and exposure to technology and the felt need to make India digital, the policy parallelly talks about adopting the online route on a lot of aspects like providing vocational courses through online mode (p. 16), developing an online community, conducting quizzes, competitions, assessing digitally, developing smart classrooms, even conducting teacher transfers through an online mode (p. 20), etc.

As the policy talks about providing vocational courses digitally, it assumes that vocational courses, whose major component is hands-on experiences, can be taught virtually. In such a case, one needs to question what will happen to the practical aspect of vocational courses and the internship/apprenticeship that is required in these courses. Similarly, if we talk about online assessments, it has its limitations. Not all types of assessments can be done online. It would be challenging to assess a child's critical thinking skills and creativity using online mode. It is likely that online assessments corroborate the system to have more objective assessment, thereby having more close-ended questions leading all the children to think alike (Kumar, 2020, May 9). The policy acknowledges the challenges and limitations of online assessment (p. 59) yet it proposes online teaching and assessment as a major modus operandi.

Moreover, the policy nowhere talks about how these goals are to be translated into reality. In such a case, POA (Programme of Action) or any complimentary document of a similar kind becomes imperative and must provide these details. The policy does acknowledge that all this would take place, once every home and/or school has internet-connected smartphones or tablets (p.20), but yet again it is not mentioned what elaborate measures or steps will be taken regarding ensuring access. The issue of access and its implications have been discussed in the subsequent section on the digital divide.

The policy also claims that new technology like artificial intelligence, smartboards,

computing devices, etc. would change the nature of learning processes (p. 56). Due to this, it is being hailed as revolutionary by some. But if one carefully observes, nowhere in the policy, has an attempt been made to give a sound rationale behind these claims. Sagopal (2020) in his article, *Decoding the Agenda* questions whether there is any credible evidence supporting that online education improves the quality of education. Reimagining a new kind of education (in this case, online education) would lead to a reshaping of the teaching-learning processes, the curriculum, etc. Therefore, one needs to raise certain questions like how exactly would technological interventions change the nature of what is to be learnt and how is it to be learnt? How would it be beneficial or lead to improvements in the educational processes? etc. These questions need to be raised and engaged with on part of the various stakeholders, to better understand the need and relevance of bringing about this change in the current system and to determine whether it would help to achieve the set aims.

Digital Divide- The Issue of Access

One of the plausible issues that may emerge in adopting online education is that of access. The issue of access existed even before the introduction of online education, but it is likely to get all the more highlighted in the context of online education discussed as follows.

According to NSSO's **Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India** (2017-18), only 8% of Indian students have access to home-based internet and computer. The availability of a computer with internet connection is about 42% and 14.9% of urban households and rural households, respectively. “A report by Nielson in 2019 concluded that 70% of the rural population does not have an active internet facility in states like West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha having the lowest internet penetration” (Chadha, K, 2020). The country also saw student and teacher protests highlighting the lack of access to smartphones, computers, and internet connection, with the announcement of online examinations. Even in households which have smartphone / computer with internet connection, it would be challenging if the same device is to be used by multiple family members.

Apart from this, there are gendered implications for online education too. When it comes to investing in the education of a girl child, parents often refrain from it and would rather prefer her to participate in household chores. There are different roles and responsibilities expected from a boy and girl child. The girl child, specifically, is expected and trained to look after children, to do all the household work, etc. This in turn determines their education or lack of it (Bhasin, 2017). In the context of online education, “studying from home is more difficult for a

girl child than for a boy in a poor and marginalized family, given the asymmetry in the distribution of domestic labour across gender” (Menon, 2020). According to NSSO Data (2017-2018), there exists a gender gap in terms of digital literacy. About only 8.1% of women know how to use the internet as compared to males where the percentage is about 17.1%, in rural areas.

Before Covid-19 pandemic, on National Girl Child Day, 2020 a report was released by the Right to Education Forum and Centre for Budget Policy Studies with support of the World Bank and UNICEF. It highlighted that currently, 40% of girls in the age-group of 15-18 years are out of school, and 30% of girls have never attended school (Gohain, 2020). Now with the introduction of online education, one can only wonder what will happen to the education of girl child, would it really become more accessible or would it end being more exclusionary in nature. Overall, the digital divide is very evident and seems to be reproducing the existing social hierarchies and thereby leading to an exclusion of a large population from education.

While the policy promotes online education, it acknowledges this digital divide and the need to eliminate it. It talks about eliminating it through the Digital India campaign and with the availability of affordable computing devices (p. 58). It also talks about using mass media like radio and television to bridge this digital divide (p. 59). Mediums like SWAYAM PRABHA are already functional, so there is not really something new that the policy suggests in this context. Also, the transmission of education through mass media like radio and television is problematic in nature. It involves no student-teacher interaction. The assumption is that a learner is like a bowl which needs to be filled with information. In this case, the learner becomes passive and there is little or no scope of questioning and critical thinking. It is important to note that this approach sounds reasonable enough in the short term or for present circumstances to increase reachability to more learners. But for the long term, the policy is missing out on a clear and elaborate plan of ensuring equitable access and thereby bridging the existing digital divide.

There are some key considerations to be kept in mind on the part of the government to overcome the digital divide and consequently for the effective implementation of the policy. Making available devices which are relatively affordable and efficient would be the first step towards this. Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme, Government provides free resources like textbooks, stationery, etc. to government school children. Similarly, it can consider providing free or low-cost yet efficient digital devices and e-resources to children. To ensure the online education of girl child, some sort of fund can be raised which would be solely utilized in providing adequate resources to the girl child for their education, to ensure they do

not drop-out. There is a need to extensively ensure availability of electricity and development of common Wi-Fi hotspots in certain areas. There is also a need for mass orientation of learners as well as their parents towards online learning and its basic know-how.

Digital Teacher-Student Interaction

Welcoming online education is a paradigm shift from the conventional teaching-learning processes. Wherein face-to-face or in-person teaching-learning, teachers could still pay individual attention and could make use of non-verbal cues from the students to judge whether they're able to understand something or not, whereas online education leaves little scope for that. It may be challenging for the teacher to ensure the engagement of each learner. As per shared and discussed experiences of recent online classes, students tend to face internet disruptions and they often switch off their cameras due to bandwidth issues. In such cases, it is difficult to ensure that each learner is actively attending the class.

Also, with the integration of technology in education and the introduction of online education, there is a high possibility that it may affect the jobs of educators. Because of online education, it may be assumed that a single teacher can cater to a large number of students. The rationale behind this can be accessibility and reachability to a large number of students at the same time. It will also help to save money in private schools, since instead of supposing 3 teachers, they could now just get the work done with one. This case scenario is highly unsound pedagogically, for education is not merely the transmission of information where the teacher will only speak and the learners will only listen to him/her passively.

Another crucial concern is that of teacher support. Children belonging to lower social and economic strata may have parents who may be unable to provide necessary or required support and handholding to their children while they struggle engaging in online classes (Menon, 2020). Children receiving little or no support from home require handholding from school which is relatively reduced in online learning

Similarly, for very young learners who are to begin school, it is tough to visualise them attaining literacy and numeracy through an online mode of education. These are the learners who need relatively more facilitator's support. It raises a concern among educators and parents about how will teaching-learning take place in this case, how would teachers be able to engage learners in the beginning stages of reading and writing digitally. It is important to note that reading and writing are not merely decoding and encoding, respectively, which may be learnt after acquaintance with the alphabets of a language. Rather, it involves continuous exposure and engagement with texts, with people and with other sources of literacy.

Hence, to conclude, online education cannot totally replace the conventional mode of education. While the policy acknowledges the importance of face-to-face learning and suggests blended models of learning (p.59), however, it fails to provide an elaboration on the same leaving it somewhat unclear to the reader.

Creation of Online Platforms and E-content

The policy talks about investing in the creation of digital infrastructure, online teaching platforms and tools, digital repositories, virtual labs, and e-content including coursework, learning games and simulations, augmented and virtual reality (p. 59). It is broadly mentioned that the e-content would be made available in major Indian languages.

One of the concerns in the creation of e-content could be homogenization of content and thereby educational experiences. Since India is a diverse country having learners of varying needs and abilities, different contexts and experiences, education and educational content in India cannot be of a homogeneous nature, but if a standardized content would be made, ready for use by all then it could lead to a certain level of homogenization amongst teachers, educational and pedagogic practices and consequently learners.

Hence, there will be a need to make localised and decentralised content. There will be a need to ensure that the classroom interactions take into account the learner's experiences and previous knowledge along with the e-content. Also, it is not clear how and who would generate this e-content.

Some like Anil Sadgopal (2020, August 1), raise the concern about who would be creating this e-content. In a webinar on New Exclusion Policy (2020), Sadgopal expressed that the goal of online education would certainly be to generate profit. It is very likely that under the garb of privatization, the responsibility of content creation would be handed over to a private agency. As a result of which the social character of education will be changed. To increase profits, there is a high chance that the private agency will produce content which is mass-production friendly and as generalizable as possible. In a scenario where learners would be absorbing generalized and mass-friendly content, he expressed that it would rob children of their critical thinking skills. If the job of content creation would be handed over to the private players, then the government or the education ministry must come up with some regulations or checks to avoid the damage discussed above.

Online Education and Health Hazards

Even before the implementation of the policy, online education has been introduced as a major modality of teaching-learning during COVID-19 times. As a result, health issues (both physiological and mental health) related to it emerged as one of the major concerns amongst stakeholders.

Since online learning is being promoted as a modality of teaching-learning by the policy for the future, there is a need to discuss and consider how it can possibly affect a learner's health. An article in Hindustan Times dated July 20, 2020, expressed how parents shared about their children developing fever, headaches, obesity, disturbed sleep patterns, constant eye and ear strain due to the increased screen-time. There is also a reported fear lingering amongst parents regarding internet and device addiction.

Online education and use of technology have an impact on mental health too. A study by Madeleine J. George and others (2017) on the relation between daily technology use and mental health symptoms in adolescents revealed that when adolescents used digital devices for longer periods of time, they experienced behavioural problems, displayed difficulty in paying attention and had ADHD symptoms. Overall, they were at an increased risk of mental health problems.

According to Halupa (2016), technology leads to a proliferation of a larger division between the haves and have-nots. There is a negative impact on youth belonging to lower-income families who cannot really afford to buy educational and technological tools they are expected to have. In addition to this, these families may not be able to provide the kind of academic and mental support that is needed outside of the classroom. This can cause stress in students due to the impact on their self-esteem and perceived self-value.

Wherein in offline classes teachers could observe students, interact with them in-person, take up cues regarding a child's mental and emotional health, in an online mode, picking up such cues and thereby providing emotional and mental support to the learners seems very challenging. Also, in offline classes, learners often have their peers with them, however in online mode, the classes may end up being really isolating and mentally alienating for some.

In such a scenario, as the policy also acknowledges, research is needed on disruptive technologies and how we can address the downsides of online or digital education. For this purpose, the policy also talks about setting up an autonomous body- National Educational Technology Forum (p. 56). An orientation and some guidelines also need to be issued on the

impact and attitude towards online education for the concerned stakeholders.

To conclude, it can be said that the idea of online education, though seemingly progressive, seems to be rushed up because it got implemented during the pandemic. It needs extensive and exhaustive research so that an elaborative framework for its efficient and effective implementation and to prevent it from turning into a setback. Also, considering its limitations and challenges, online education needs to be seen as one of the alternatives appropriately blended with face to face mode of teaching-learning processes.

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Private Philanthropy or Privatisation?

Tripti Upadhyay

Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 gives a lot of space for private participation in the education sector in the name of private philanthropy, as compared to any other previous policies. It needs to be looked at carefully how the increased presence of the private sector may affect education in the context of our country. With its use of ambiguous and veiled language, the policy gives enough scope to look critically at the concept of private participation. This paper is attempting the same.

Keywords: Private Philanthropists, Philanthropy, Privatisation, National Education Policy, Right to Education, Disparity, Education

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 appears to be a perfect and an all encompassing document with its use of beautiful, flowery and glossy language throughout. The text, at first, does not appear to be much of an issue. When seen in the context, it may raise many questions and doubts. “So, fears of the document come from the context rather than the text. The text itself is for the most part admirable.” (Mehta, 2020). First, it came up during the pressing times of pandemic COVID-19. Second, it is the first policy to be passed without being discussed in the Parliament. Could the Parliamentary discussion bring to the fore such objections which would make it difficult to pass the policy in its current form? It also makes one wonder how a draft of more than four hundred pages can be compressed into a mere sixty page document. Obviously, a lot has been compressed and left to the reader's imagination to elaborate and make sense of. This paper is an attempt in similar exercise. Here we shall try to analyse the policy's constant invocation to 'private philanthropists' in the field of education.

Philanthropy is when someone voluntarily donates money for a certain cause. Usage of the phrase 'private philanthropists' gives the idea that private individuals or organisations would donate money for the endeavour of the education. It appears as if this provision is for facilitating the corporate social responsibility required of the private sector. There are two ways in which it can be done. Either the private sector donates money to the existing educational institutions or they open new private institutions for the same. The policy clearly implies that the latter way of opening up new institutions is looked forward to by the government. There is no mention of donation or monetary grant from the 'philanthropists'. Instead the terms used are “encouraging”, “participation”, “linkage with”, “partnership”, “at

Tripti Upadhyaya M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

par” with the public, “empower”, “support” etc. for the 'private philanthropists'. The third point related to the context comes into play here, as to look at the document in the light of the government's overall policy and attitude towards private establishments in current times. An important point to note is that the policy nowhere attempts to differentiate between the private and the private philanthropist. Instead it indicates that these can be used interchangeably by referring in this manner: “private/philanthropic schools” (NEP 30,31).

It would be helpful if we look behind in the history of education in our country and locate when and why we needed to include the private sector in education. During the Balance of Payment Crisis in India, in 1991, India was in dire need of funds. The country had to pledge its gold reserves to receive a loan from the International Monetary Fund. As a result, India had to make certain drastic changes in its economic policy, what we now know as LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) reforms. Long story short, this turning point in Indian economy drastically increased the private footprints in every sector in the country. Though private players have exponentially increased in the field of education, over the years, no education policy has openly relied this heavily on private contribution for success. In the words of Prof. Anil Sadgopal, “It is for the first time the State has brazenly advocated for private schools,” abrogating its own responsibility(2020). It is questionable why the government still needs private investment in education when Indian economy is third in the world and striving to be in second position soon.

Let us look at the possible impacts of the increased 'private philanthropy' in various fields of education:

'Private Philanthropy' antithetical to RTE?

86th Amendment of the Constitution inserted Article 21A to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Consequently, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act was also passed in 2009, laying down the essential norms and standards for guaranteeing the Right to Education under Right to Life. The placement of Right to Education under Right to Life, speaks volumes about the importance of education in one's life. Under the RTE, the State (both Central and State government) is obliged to provide education to everyone under its ambit. No doubt, it puts immense burden on the state. Earlier, education was included in the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy that is the State 'ought' to make provisions for education but could not be questioned in a court of law for the absence or lack of it.

It was in good faith that the efforts of the State will lead to rising educational standards of the

country. But even after more than 70 years of independence, the educational scenario of our country could be called dismal. This is despite the opening of the education sector to private players, and intervention of the World Bank into our educational policies. It is high time to make an essential requisite like education a right which the country's citizens can demand from the State, and the State is obliged to provide.

An essential promise of RTE 2009 is to provide 'free' education to the concerned age group. It states that any school run by the central or any state government cannot deny admission and education to any child in the face of inability to pay for it. As a result, the State has to invest in the education of the children. However, the provision does not include private schools under its ambit. Hence any privately run school can deny admission and education to a child if the child is not able to pay the fees decided by the private institution. Also, we find huge variations in the fee structure of different private schools. No denying the fact the private schools earn from the 'business' of education and they are not here for social service only. In a country like India, where, if I may say, poverty is rampant, despite a rising middle class, it becomes, all the more essential for the government to take up the responsibility of providing education to all. For this, it needs to invest heavily in making quality education accessible and affordable to all, without expecting any monetary returns, at least in the immediate future. Education is an investment in the human resource of the country and often its results are long-awaited and in different forms, other than monetary. It would be a folly to expect the same from a private establishment which will not be able to function without monetary returns. The expression of 'National Education Policy 2020' raises certain flags/doubts regarding the above mentioned intervention required from the government. It appears to be paving way for more privately owned educational structures, while reducing the government funding in the education sector.

No philanthropy needed in ECCE!

Another doubt cast on the 'philanthropy' aspect is when the philanthropists are not invoked for ECCE. In the new policy ECCE is clubbed with the first two years of primary education. Two things are needed to be looked at carefully here. One, Early Childhood Care and Education requires a lot of efforts on the part of the provider. More than education, it caters to health and nutrition, safe and secure environment during the formative years. This program is being carried out majorly through Anganwadis and Balwadis. It is not a very lucrative area for a private investor. More often than not, the Anganwadis cater to socially and economically backward sections, who will neither be willing nor able to pay for early nutritional care. Second, the age group for ECCE is largely 3 to 6 years, which falls outside the ambit of RTE 2009. As a sad implication, the government is not obliged to provide for an ECCE on any

statutory compulsion/basis. In order to reduce its expenditure, the government can easily pull out of the sector, without being culpable in any court of law. Hence, it need not provide a cover of increasing private footprint catering to ECCE, in order to reduce its investment in the field.

'Private Philanthropy' not for Providing Resources

We have already discussed the importance of RTE 2009 in education in India. Ironically, NEP 2020 remains silent on RTE. It is mentioned once in passing, maybe as a desperate attempt of acknowledging its existence (NEP2020,p.10). The policy nowhere seems to accept the tenets of RTE and shows signs of tampering with it (Rampal,2020, in discussion with D.Suresh Kumar). The policy suggests combining the 'economically sub-optimal' schools into a complex in order to share resources (NEP,2020,p.28). What else could this difficulty be, except for their requiring more resources and investment than the government is willing to provide. Merging of schools into complexes may increase the chances of availability of resources but it does not make it easier. If a certain resource is available in another school of the complex, which is very far from the residence as well as the school of the learner, there is further less probability of their being able to access that resource. It appears this consolidation is not so much for ensuring education, as it is for administrative convenience. It would require further expenditure on part of schools to make those resources reachable, or else the situation will continue to be the same. The policy suggests a judicious consolidation of schools to ensure access, but at the same time finds it limiting to solve the structural problem (p.29). Those which cannot be merged in a complex, and are still difficult for the state to maintain, on account of being 'economically sub-optimal', is it to be inferred that these will be closed? If not, then one is left to wonder what would be the approach, meted out to those schools. In case of closing of such schools, whatever resources were available to learners in the area, are also being snatched away.

While the RTE promises accessibility of equitable and quality education to every child in the country,both these steps will further increase the gap between the learners and their right to education. Interestingly, private philanthropy is not involved in any of the above scenarios to aid in making available the requisite resources to all the learners, within their reachability. True philanthropy would have been aiding the government in providing the requisite resources to the already existing schools and raising their standards. Alas, the policy misses upon this golden chance of getting its burden shared in improving the quality and accessibility of education for all.

Eased regulations to promote 'Private Philanthropy'

The policy, however, advocates for easing the regulations for opening private educational institutions. “Transparent public self-disclosure of all the basic regulatory information, as laid down by the SSSA, will be used extensively for public oversight and accountability” (p.31).

Easing the regulation on quality checks can have an adverse impact on the condition of education in the country. There are many privately run schools and colleges which do not qualify the standards as laid by the regulatory boards. NEP 2020 also acknowledges this menace and talks of curbing it. But this suggestion is made only in the higher education sector. Policy is silent about the issue in terms of private schools. It is well-known that private schools decide their fees on their own. Many do not have required infrastructure, employ untrained teachers, pay less to the employees, earn heavy margins through books and uniforms etc. thereby violating the norms as laid by RTE Act, 2009. Dr Poonam Batra (2020) expresses this concern as–

a large number of these private schools do not fulfil Right to Education norms. By making “requirements for schools less restrictive,” in order to augment “non-governmental philanthropic organizations” and “to allow alternative models of education”, NEP 2020 encourages further privatisation of elementary education. In doing this, the policy makes way for regularising low fee paying schools with poor infrastructure and untrained teachers, and legitimises one-teacher -schools. Both of these are in violation of Right to Education norms, but could provide the basis to mainstream over one lakh “one-teacher” Ekal Vidyalayas spread across the country. As a result, states that have made considerable progress in fulfilling Right to Education norms and doing away with one teacher schools – for example, Himachal Pradesh – will be pushed back into institutionalising educational inequity.

In such a scenario, considering self assessment and self declaration enough in the name of regulatory mechanism, is like putting a blind side to the grave issues of corruption, economic exploitation, reduced quality of education, etc. We have often heard of the educational institutions being run only on the papers and there being none in reality. Only self assessment and self declaration can serve as a boon for such invisible institutions

'Private Philanthropy': An Attack on Equity

The NEP is also silent on reservation in the 'private philanthropic' institutions (whose

philanthropic credibility is seriously questionable). The Constitution aims at providing social justice to the various backward and marginalised sections of the society, for example - schedule tribes, scheduled castes, other backward classes, females, minorities etc. For the same, a total of 50% reservation is earmarked for all these categories in all government run institutions. However private institutions are not obliged to comply with such reservations except for the 25% reservation for EWS (Economically Weaker Sections). In the absence of any mention of reservation to be followed by “private philanthropic “ institutions, at best the maintenance of status quo can be expected i.e. reservations for EWS learners. With decreasing government institutions, (as suggested by closing of 'economically sub-optimal' schools), the cause of social justice for which the above categories are upheld by the Constitution and the apex court of the country, get hampered. The trajectory of their social mobility runs the risk of getting derailed. Hence, increasing privatisation may cause further disruptions in the social fabric of India, by not providing equal opportunities, as mandated by the Constitution.

NEP 2020 is based on a relatively shallow understanding of the ground realities of education in an unequal society. It does not provide a coherent perspective of the means of providing quality and equitable public education. It blurs the boundaries of core Constitutional values of equality, fraternity and justice, essential to the education of democratic and secular citizens. (Batra, 2020)

'Private Philanthropy' leading to disparity

When a new institution is opened up by someone, the responsibility of its proper functioning also lies with the same person or the organisation. The private philanthropist now becomes a private player in the field, as he is not limited to donating the money, but is running a full - fledged institution. Hence it can be doubted that the philanthropist is just a sugar- coated word for a private businessman in the field, who is not donating, but investing in the field of education. Any investment always has certain results. The private institutions will also earn from the fees of the students coming there to study. Of course, that would be the income of the private investor, with only the levied tax reaching the state exchequer. Hence, we see how the 'philanthropist' would have the opportunity to engage in the business being served on the platter. The policy nowhere addresses this apprehension or puts necessary checks on the possibility of profit making by the private philanthropist institutions.

The only thing regarding the finances of the private institution mentioned in the policy is about the institution to provide freeships to 20 percent students and scholarships to 30 percent

students of the institution (NEP,2020,p.49). Who is going to pay for these scholarships? Of course, not the government. The government, in this idea, is showing good faith in the 'private philanthropist' to bear upon himself the subsidy here. But if we try to look at it practically, 50 percent of students would be paying the fee without any cost cutting. High chances that the fee collected from these 50 percent students would be used to recover the cost of the freeships and the scholarships provided to the other 50 percent students. (Chattopadhyay,2020). That means, each student who is paying from his pocket, is not just paying for himself, but at least for one more co learner. And the private philanthropist does not need to pay even a penny from his pocket; instead has a chance of filling it more in the business. The real philanthropist here would be the student paying his fee, and inadvertently, of his co learner. Even if one realises so, and yet continues to pay, it can get detrimental to the collegiality among the learners (Patnaik,2020). It has also been witnessed that high fees create an environment of elitism in the institution. The institution is also bound to provide highly comforting infrastructural facilities if they are charging hefty amounts. As a result, such institutions draw 'consumers' from a particular class of the society and they bring in their elite culture very easily into the institutional environment. In such a scenario, many learners may be compelled to change their decisions of pursuing education further as they will not be able to afford it. The increased cost of education can get very costly and life altering for them (Chattopadhyay,2020). Even though a learner enters through scholarship, as anticipated in the NEP 2020, the atmosphere is drastically charged and s/he might have to face great difficulty in adjusting to it. It might often feel embarrassing and demeaning to such learners to be associated with a poor household. The disparity between the statuses becomes glaringly visible, thus affecting the socialising patterns as well of the learners. Often two groups of 'Haves' and 'Have nots' get formed in such conditions and it is once again detrimental to the vision of equality in the Constitution.

Such disparity and resulting discrimination is visible outside the educational institution as well, especially in case of school students, as government institutions in higher education still hold some more respect as compared to government sponsored schools. It is considered to be a status symbol for parents to be able to send their children to private, english medium schools. Governments throughout the country have had to work really hard, in the past decade to revamp their image of a worthwhile and quality educational institution. These efforts have also created certain hierarchies among government schools as well, like Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodayas and Rashtriya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas being considered way above other government and municipal corporation schools, while the latter cater to way more learners than the former and the private schools together. The need of the hour is to upgrade the quality

of education in these schools as well and make them and the learners therein more acceptable in society instead of increasing privatisation and sending the government schools further into the abyss. Some might contest this, but I am afraid of such a scenario as there is an implication of reduced monetary infusion on part of government. Closing of non viable schools, forming school complexes of distantly located schools, giving leeway to private institutions in terms of self regulation and self assessment - all these will appear to a critical eye as desperate attempts on part of the government to wash its hands off the heavy responsibility of providing education to every child, no matter how flowery or glossy language is used to present them as promising options.

Internationalisation

Another lucrative proposal in NEP 2020, is 'Internationalisation'. The government plans to open campuses in foreign countries and allow foreign universities to open campuses on Indian soil (p.39). We need to tread very carefully while implementing this idea. Mere mention of this ambition without any details around it (as is the case with many other proposals in the NEP 2020), raises many questions that need to be answered. Are these the top- ranking universities of the world? Or those who are looking for markets in foreign countries? Will these universities have fee structure considering the affordability of the majority of the students in India? What would be the quality of courses offered by them in india? Will those be at par with the world standards or India being a developing country be a dumping ground of second rate and non popular courses? What and where would be the career prospects after going through their programmes? An in- depth discussion on the issues regarding Internationalisation can lead to one more article. Therefore, here I will restrict myself to one rationale provided by the government for bringing foreign universities in India. NEP 2020 states that opening up of foreign colleges in India will “provide greater mobility to students in India who may wish to visit, study at, transfer credits to, or carry out research at institutions abroad, and vice versa”(p.39). It needs to be looked carefully at who are these students, which social and economic stratum they belong to. The huge cost incurred in getting foreign education does not let the poor and most of the middle class even dream about it. It is accessible for the people who are very rich, can afford the cost of studies as well as living in a foreign location for a longer period, as required by the study programme. Bringing these colleges to India is easing the burden on the wallets of these select few in the country. Even if it may appear to be geographically nearer, there still seems no indication if these colleges will be affordable for the rest of the population. How much will the foreign university be willing to overlook its profit for providing quality and low- cost education to learners of another country, especially in face

of the country's own government trying to reduce its investment in education. It is the only time something foreign is accepted in the policy, “which is surprising, given the avowed preference for indigenous resources”(Krishna Kumar,,2020,p.20). The only logical thread that binds it with rest of the policy is of economic benefits as India is a lucrative 'market' for any foreign university or institution given its large young population, and this will also bring increased FDI into the country.

'Private philanthropy' in research

No denying the fact that we need strong push in research and development in the country. Universities, the seat of research, lose a lot of precious time in logistics and administration, thus hampering the research work. There is also lack of funds for serious and intensive research to be successfully carried out as only 0.69 percent of GDP is incurred on research as of now (p.45). As we have seen till now, wherever economic support is required, the policy opens the door for the private philanthropists to enter. I wonder- what would be the extent of their participation and control on, as well as how eased would be the regulations for them in the field of research. Nonetheless, with the establishment of private universities, by default they are expected to invest more in research. Research does not promise frequent economic gains, moreover, it may lead to further expenditure for improvement or betterment in a particular field.

Good research from any sector - government or private - is always welcome. However, when the concept of private philanthropy is extended to the field of research as well, we need to consider its plausible pros and cons ,in order to make informed choices and decide for necessary checks and regulations. The private philanthropists do not arise in a vacuum. These are the people and establishments who have earned enough from the market to invest or donate in other areas. Hence, they hold a significant position in the market economy. A heavily privately funded research carries the risk of being used, or rather misused, to help the investor manipulate the market. Lee McIntyre, in his book Post-Truth warns us against such research as targeted to promote a business interest. He even goes to the extent of saying that the entirely private funded research institutes are set up for the above mentioned purpose by producing counter research to those threatening their business (pp.21-34). He talks of one such incident in the USA, in the wake of research linking cigarette smoking with cancer. The tobacco industry came together and decided:

they needed a unified approach where they would “fight the science” by sponsoring additional “research.” The executives agreed to fund this under the

auspices of Hill's newly created Tobacco Industry Research Committee Science Denial as a Road Map 23 whose mission was to convince the public that there was “no proof” that cigarette smoking caused cancer and that previous work purporting to show such a link was being questioned by “numerous scientists.” And it worked. (Oreskes & Conway,pp.14-16,as cited in Mcintyre,pp.22-23)

The story did not end here. In fact it became a blueprint for others to follow, like in case of “nuclear winter, acid rain, the ozone hole, second hand tobacco smoke and global warming” (Oreskas and Conway, pp.15,33, as cited in Mcintyre, pp.25,29).

Emergency or Opportunity?

Interestingly enough, the NEP 2020 has a section dedicated to online education which was missing in the draft policy of 2019. The final policy was passed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, when everyone was forced to resort to online modes of education throughout the world. As a result, online education found its place in the National Education Policy as well. Not just during the pandemic, the country should in general be prepared with some sort of 'education during emergency' kind of concept. India is a country where various natural or manmade disasters cause frequent disruptions in the education, for example floods, earthquakes, landslides, heavy rainfall, riots etc. Previous and the current year has seen almost all these mishappenings along with the current global pandemic. Online education can be helpful to a certain extent in a particular kind of emergency but cannot be an answer for all the emergencies. Especially during the natural disasters, the network connections, the basic prerequisite for online education, get completely disrupted.

Instead of looking at various factors impacting education during emergencies, NEP 2020 seems to consider online mode of education as panacea during all kinds of emergencies. As discussed many times not everyone in this country can afford a mobile or a laptop or a computer with an internet connection. Recently a lot has been written about the ill effects of online education on physical health as well as social and emotional behaviour of children. The online and distance learning mode mostly caters to those who are not able to access education physically or cannot commit themselves to full time engagement with the formal educational process. Hence the attempt to shift to online mode of learning and or blended mode of learning for everyone is not a very wise step. It also runs the danger of being used as the alternative means of increasing gross enrollment, instead of opening physical institutions.

The policy also roots for all the books to be digitally available so that they are "downloadable and printable." No doubt it is a good step in terms of increasing accessibility, but it does not mean it should replace the government's efforts and investment in providing the students books and study material free of cost. If we rely on the online material only then the cost of downloading and getting the books printed falls on the child and the family and again the very poor of the country cannot afford even that much. As a result ,the simple act of increasing accessibility may lead to the termination of the process of schooling of many children in the country.

Most importantly it requires infrastructure including the devices and the network connection. Equipping the schools with improved technological aids, like smartboards, also comes under the same ambit. Who is going to provide this infrastructure other than the private players in the market. We have seen during the promotion of smart classes in schools, one company had control over the whole market. Further increase in aids for online education gives a golden chance to private companies to enter profusely in the education sector in the name of providing devices, network connections, creating online softwares etc. and earn really huge profits. The Prime Minister's call for turning the crisis into opportunity, though may have said with a wider connotation, may hold literal significance for these business entities.

For the arguments presented above, one may contest that they paint a dismal picture of the policy concerned, or come heavily onto its provisions. In defence I would say that such a scope has been provided by the policy itself with its lack of clarity and use of ambiguous language. It is imperative to critically analyse all possible fallouts at the policy level so as to avoid those during the implementation process. Hence this exercise is not to admonish the policy but to bring to the fore the fears that can creep into the implementation due to profuse ambiguity resorted to in the policy document, if we are not careful enough.

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National Education Policy -- 2020 ON Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students

Aakriti Sharma

Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 is a topic of discussion amongst scholars, experts, and practitioners alike. While the ongoing debates centre around issues like online education and privatisation, reflections on creating the optimal learning environment and student support in higher education are just a handful. This paper focuses on analysing the policy recommendations on creating an optimal environment for learning and student support measures in higher education. The analysis undertaken includes step by step deconstruction of recommendations given by the policymakers. The conceptions of various educational concepts amongst policymakers, feasibility issues of recommendations and their impacts on learners and institutions are discussed throughout the paper. This analysis brings forth the aspirational character of the policy document while the touch with reality and achievement of previously stated goals in the field of education remain unfulfilled. Conclusion specifies some more perspectives for analysis. The discussions in this paper open new sites for scrutiny in education policy related discourses.

Keywords: Education, Policy, Learning Environment, Assessment, Open and Distance Learning, Internationalization, Scholarship

Introduction

Education is a matter of great significance in the contemporary world. For a developing nation like India, it assumes an even more consequential role. It is not only considered as the solution for prevailing social evils, but also as one of those promising means through which India will go up the ladder of hierarchy and achieve the status of a developed nation. As a subject of tremendous importance, the state of education in any country should be looked at with critical and insightful gaze. In that aspect, the education policy becomes a pivotal document that should be thoroughly scrutinized, for it entails within itself the hopes and aspirations of masses. In this paper, I have tried to critically analyse the aims and claims that have been laid out for creating an optimal learning environment and student support system by the National Education Policy 2020.

Following the precedent of lauded curricular document that was NCF 2005, NEP 2020 has made a seemingly progressive move in devoting an entire section on creating an Optimal Learning Environment and support for students under the Higher Education category. However, it is imperative to deconstruct and analyze how the policy has conceptualized and treated this term, as a myriad of educational theorists and thinkers alike have conceived the idea of an Optimal Learning Environment in multifarious ways. In order to examine the

Aakriti Sharma M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

approach adopted by this policy, I will discuss what all has been placed under this section in exact chronological order.

Let us begin by digging into the term 'Optimal Learning Environment'. As the word 'optimal' indicates, it seems that the policy intends to ensure a learning environment that enables learning to the greatest or most favourable extent. In this regard, different schools of thought and theories of the educational field may supply different ways and means for fulfilling this criterion of creating an Optimal Learning Environment. This is because they assume different meanings and interpretations for what should be considered as knowledge, what is the process of learning, what is the role of the learner, etc. For instance, if one goes by the progressive approach held by constructivists and experiential learning theorists, the Optimal Learning Environment can be ensured by providing learners with the opportunities to engage in meaningful learning experiences. This can be done by creating an interactive, stimulating and nurturing space wherein learners can actively participate in the process of knowledge creation. Dewey (1897) has emphasized on this psycho-social character of learning in his groundbreaking writing 'My Pedagogic Creed'.

Coming back to the policy, let us look at how the policy conceptualises the idea of the Optimal Learning Environment. Policymakers have begun this section by listing four cornerstones for quality learning, namely, curriculum, pedagogy, continuous assessment, and student support (NEP, 2020, p. 38). The document explicates that a comprehensive approach involving all these factors would make the learning environment student-friendly and effective. In this regard policy promises about the updation of knowledge and a continuous cycle of assessment. However, the policy does not say much about pedagogy aside from the fact that it should be engaging and of high-quality. Neither does the policy mention what kind of pedagogy should be considered of high-quality, nor any how's and why's regarding making pedagogy high-quality. This leaves one confused on what method or approach does the policy advocate regarding pedagogic processes in higher education. Also, phrases like 'imparting curricular materials', 'scientific assessment' and 'outcome-based pedagogy' indicate towards positivist leanings as they leave little scope for bidirectional, personalized and process-oriented pedagogy. This is problematic as the context and individuality of the learner finds no space in such a learning environment which makes it rather disconnected than an Optimal Learning Environment for the learner. It should be noted that when a policy document is crafted, the idea of what is considered as knowledge becomes a fundamental concern. It has a huge impact on the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and on the learner. Unless one lays those basic considerations transparently, the policy may be subject to misinterpretations.

Mentioning high-quality learning/pedagogy/knowledge is not sufficient in itself as maybe the case reflecting here.

After specifying these cornerstones of quality learning, recommendations that will help in creating the Optimal Learning Environment and supporting students are listed down in the document. To quote from the document, **"First, in order to promote creativity, institutions and faculty will have the autonomy to innovate on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within a broad framework of higher education qualifications that ensures consistency across institutions and programmes and across the ODL, online, and traditional 'in-class' modes."**(NEP, 2020, p. 38) This particular section from the text contains several implicit ideas. This linkage of creativity with autonomy is only on the part of the institution and it is silent towards creative space for other stakeholders - learners, parents, etc. which again raises the concern of a unidimensional approach. In general, there is always some flexibility exercised by the teachers in terms of pedagogy and assessment, on that note there is nothing novel or concrete said here in that regard. However, this statement assumes a new meaning if one links these autonomous roles on the part of the institutions as a move towards privatisation in higher education. In this light, the intention behind putting this statement here should be questioned. If this is really about privatisation then it may further increase the prevailing disparities in the quality of education and learning environment amongst these different modes of education instead of bridging that gap. At this point, some people will talk about quality education provided at private institutions. However, it may not truly be the case with all private institutions and above all their access can not be ensured for everyone. It is not hidden from common people that some sham private universities provide certification or degree without even needing the learner to engage in any academic process, just simply by paying hefty fees. Cases of unrecognised universities giving sham degrees are also emerging. One must keep this in mind that the private sector has its own policies and agendas to invest in the field of education. Being charitable donors or partners and providing educational rights definitely do not come under their responsibilities and motives.

Policy proposes that assessment systems, even leading to final certification shall be decided by the higher education institutions and talks about revising the Choice Based Credit System(NEP, 2020, P.38). Though policy recommends it by claiming this to be a flexible and innovative way, these intentions may only come to fruition if learning goals decided for the same shall be of such nature that provides scope for flexibility and innovation. Given the autonomy advocated by the policymakers for these matters, one needs to see that learning goals decided by different higher education institutions should remain comparable. First, there

will be a need of educating and enabling teachers in deciding the learning goals. Also, it should be ensured that all these learning goals decided are catered within that specific programme or course. Otherwise, it would turn out to be like some school systems where certain criteria are printed in the mark sheet (SUPW, Work Experience) and learners are also assigned grades based on them but those activities never take place in reality.

In the second recommendation, the concept of Institutional Development Plans have been introduced which will integrate plans ranging from curricular improvements to quality of classroom transactions, yet no necessary explanation has been provided about its why's and how's. How are we enabling faculty for this daunting task of curriculum improvement, finds no mention. For any curricular reform to take place, in this case creating an Optimal Learning Environment, teacher becomes an important medium and agent. One needs to redefine the role and the responsibility of the teacher and other stakeholders in education for realisation of these reforms.

In listing the roles of the institutions, policy also emphasizes the commitment for holistic development and creating support for diverse student cohorts in academic and social domains. The concept of topic-centred clubs and activities is mentioned regarding this. However, as per the document, for incorporating such clubs and activities in curriculum, it has to first meet the criterion of establishing appropriate campus, student demands and faculty expertise for the same, and in order to do this, institutions will have mechanisms and opportunities for funding such activities, initially on experimental basis (NEP, 2020, p. 39). This may seem plausible, but it may not necessarily be an inclusive step. For one's interests to find a place in the curriculum, it will have to pass the test of getting chosen and accepted by a population. This goes against the spirit of creating a supportive environment. Though this proposition seems to be a prima facie case of providing exposure and opportunities, it is a responsibility that is now turned on to the learners themselves. It may narrow down the options that one could choose from if it has to be this market-governed.

In its third recommendation, policy acknowledges the struggles faced by the students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups in transitioning to higher education. The provision of setting up “high-quality” support centres and providing funds and resources for the same has been proposed. Also, professional, academic and career counselling has been envisaged for physical, psychological and emotional well-being of the students (NEP, 2020, p. 39). It is a welcome step that policy recognises the struggles of students and counselling has been given space. However, merely providing monetary aid is not the solution. Optimal or student-

friendly learning environment is not just a matter of infrastructure and physical spaces. For instance, if the classroom or institute's environment is exclusionary and discriminative in general, how can the counsellors in the same campus ensure students' well-being? For social and emotional well-being of students, more intrinsic systemic and societal reforms are needed. Here, the role of every stakeholder comes into place. For Optimal Learning Environment institutions, teachers, students, parents, the entire education system on local and global levels need to be sensitive towards students' needs and well-being. Students' mental health is a matter of grave concern.

Fourth recommendation comes in the form of expansion of Open and Distance Learning(ODL) and online education with reforms in its quality to make it equivalent to in-class programmes. Policy claims that ODL and online education provide a natural path to increase access to quality higher education(NEP, 2020, p. 39). This will be done by putting across standards, guidelines, regulatory and accreditation processes. Before putting the claim that quality education is being provided through ODL the policy must ensure that it is truly the case. When policy states that ODL programmes will aim to be equivalent to the highest quality in-class programmes, it is inherent in the statement itself that in-class and ODL programmes indeed provide two different qualitative experiences. ODL, as a substitute for regular in-class courses, have been thoroughly criticized by many experts in the field of education. As per them it goes against the students' right to access quality higher education. In this regard only stipulating norms and standards may not necessarily lead to qualitative learning environments. First the pedagogy, interaction, resources, need to be reformed through and through for enhancing the quality of the learning environment. Then only the norms and guidelines of accreditation will make sense. The idea is to improve the system intrinsically and not merely through providing labels. Otherwise, it will prove to be a regressive approach, as a result of which, ODL and online education programmes of low quality and malpractices like bribery to get accreditation may increase. This should be taken care of very strictly. In addition to ODL, the provision of multiple exits in courses is also under great scrutiny. Batra (2020) is doubtful about this policy's intention of introducing multiple exits in courses, it is suggested that multiple exit system may in turn lead to pushing dropouts in higher education. The policy, not adhering to provide universalisation of higher education and coming up with measures like multiple exits system and expansion of ODL, suggests government's neglect towards fulfilling the duty of providing fundamental right to education (Sadgopal, 2020).

Through all these recommendations the policy puts forth the intention to develop global quality and standards in all courses and programmes of all modes and mediums, and to achieve

'internationalization at home'. For realising this goal a separate topic 'Internationalization' finds place in this section of the policy. The idea is to attract foreign education seekers into Indian context through indigenous courses and premium education at affordable rates. Another motive of internationalization, as per the policy, is feasibility in transference of native individuals who are interested to move abroad for foreign education and research destinations. Setting up of International Students Offices, collaboration and exchange with foreign institutions will be facilitated in this regard. The dream of restoring ancient Vishwa Guru status and making India a global study destination is amply accentuated in this document. While all these hopes and intentions are well and good, one must not forget that attracting foreign audiences does not merely depend upon courses and programmes. Individuals who go abroad do look for better education and exposure. However, they also look at job opportunities, market, safety, security and other such factors. Without providing better lifestyle conditions and making Indian ecosystem hospitable, one cannot ensure whether cheaper education will guarantee foreign traffic.

In addition, top performing universities will be encouraged to open campuses abroad. Similarly, top foreign universities will be welcome to set up campuses here with controls at par with autonomous institutions (NEP, 2020, p. 39). It will be interesting to look at the criteria through which these "top performing" universities would be selected. It must be ensured that such opportunities may not be given based on political affiliations and capitalist agendas. Also, relevance and quality of foreign University run courses must be assured. Sadgopal (2020) mentions the UNESCO report in which it has been claimed that often the foreign universities that are opened in countries are either of low quality or they offer courses of little relevance. This matter should be dealt with careful consideration of its impact on our learning environment.

Overall, the focus on Internationalization in this section of Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students in NEP 2020 is in abundance. However, this move in higher education can prove to be equally bad as good. While upgrading our native institutions to global level, we must carefully consider the standards that we need to achieve. Who is deciding these standards for us and how will our education and institutions retain their Indianness while achieving this Internationalization is an important concern. It must be ensured that Indian context and diversity must be catered while welcoming foreign universities. A genuinely progressive move would be to secure admissions for marginalized students as well in these universities apart from those who could afford their fees.

Towards the end, the policy emphasised on the role of students as stakeholders in the education system. Policy reiterates its efforts towards providing exposure and support to students. Though when it comes to financial assistance for marginalised groups, policy takes the route of meritocracy by incentivising their merits. Bringing the concept of meritocracy in providing support to marginalised students is a mockery of their circumstances. One must be appreciated for performing well in academics, but it should not be turned into a deciding factor for those who deserve support and sensitive treatment. Applying the principle of meritocracy in such a situation may end up disturbing the learning environment, instead of making it supportive and desirable. In the end, policy barely touches upon the concept of financial assistance and scholarships for students. **The National Scholarship Portal will be expanded to support, foster, and track the progress of students receiving scholarships. Private HEIs will be encouraged to offer larger numbers of free ships and scholarships to their students (NEP, 2020, p. 40).** The responsibility for providing scholarships is shifted onto private higher education institutions while policy only talks about expansion and digitalization of National Scholarship Portal on the public instruction's part.

Engaging in the activity of studying a policy document is a dynamic and ongoing process. It can not be limited to a single academic writing. Nevertheless, every academic writing has its own space and limitations. I would like to begin my concluding remarks by delineating the limitation of this paper. The arguments and analysis presented in this document can be extended by bringing in the comparative lens and analysing this policy document by comparing it with other educational policies. The policy can also be analysed by looking at it through the perspective of how well it upholds the Constitutional values stated in the Constitution. The analysis done in this paper, can be summarised through following concluding remarks.

Understanding any education policy without its program of action or scheme of implementation is a challenging task. Even so this task must be done with great zeal and rigour. For it is in analysing this document and finding out its inherent incoherences and loopholes, that the contingency of possibility of realisation of dreams and aspirations of an education system lies. The National Education Policy 2020 touches upon various factors that enables one in creating an optimal and student supporting learning environment. However, the big dreams that have been envisaged in this document are little in consonance with present ground realities. While policy talks about monetary support and Internationalization at great length, it fails at considering the learning environment as more than a material space. Context and individuality of learners find little explicit mention in this section, despite the fact that learners

are to be the main beneficiaries of getting an Optimal Learning Environment and student support. In mentioning Internationalization, the policy must be questioned upon the grounds whether it is there for mainly catering to foreign students or the native ones.

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Early Childhood Care and Education in India and its Perception in NEP-2020

Mansi Wadhwa

Abstract

NEP 2020 is the second National Policy of India which focuses upon the early years of our children of India but this policy has been extolled specifically for its views about Early Childhood Care and Education as if the previous policy NEP1986 has not even addressed ECCE. The focus of this article is to look upon the perception of ECCE in the National Education Policy of 2020 with comparison to NPE1986 so as to analyze what new dimensions and suggestions for the upliftment of early learners have this policy added in the area of ECCE for which it has been lauded a lot Or, is it simply talking upon the previous lines of NPE1986?

Keywords: Malnutrition, Mortality, Morbidity, School Readiness, High-Quality ECCE, Language, Literacy, Numeracy

Introduction

The early years, defined globally as age 0-8, is known to be the most important stage of development of the human brain. A large body of worldwide research demonstrates that exposure to enabling environments and access to appropriate inputs during this period is fundamental to ensuring that children have a firm foundation on which to build, both in school and in life (ASER 2019). Also, the research in neuroscience provides convincing evidence that “experience-based brain development in the early years sets neurological and biological pathways that affect health, learning, and behavior throughout life.” (Mustard, 2007:40). These critical years of the child's life are named as “Early Childhood Stage”, and this stage of child's life across the world has been taken care of by Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) which has gained universal importance in laying the strong and holistic foundation for the development of young learners. But this article will be focussing only upon the ECCE in India, its implementation, the status of teachers, etc., by attempting a comparative review of NEP 2020 with NEP 1986.

India is a land of diversity and also a land of huge economic disparity wherein there are some children who are overfed and some who are not even fed once in a day. These are the children who do not get an optimal child care environment in the earlier years of their lives which thus, leads to developmental delays and deficits for life. There is a research finding which depicts that “ By the time poorer children in many countries reach school age, they are at a significant disadvantage in social and cognitive abilities” (The World Bank, 2005b:132). Also, research within India has demonstrated the significant impact that ECCE can make, in order to compensate for these deficits, at some level and enable children to have a strong foundation. A

Mansi Wadhwa M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

major cohort study conducted retrospectively in eight states of the country demonstrated up to 20 percent impact of ECCE on reduction in dropouts and continuation of children in primary grades (NCERT, 1994). So, it will be logical to say that if a country wants a qualitative human capital then it should surely invest at this stage of a child's life. Broadly, if we talk about India, whose main asset in the coming years will be its “youth power”, as India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade (National Education Policy,2020,p.3).

Recently, the National Education Policy was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020 and it has been extolled as a milestone for proposing a robust policy for Early Childhood Care and Education. But if we look at our previous national policy, which is NEP1986, it had also very well addressed the importance and need of ECCE and also in its Plan Of Action(POA)1992 it very well talks about the implementation strategies and areas of reform which need to be made in ECCE. Then the question which arises is whether NEP2020 addresses any new aspect of ECCE, or it merely repeats the issues which were raised by NEP 1986, in a new mould?

NEP2020 eradicated the age group 0-3

The basic emphasis of NEP 1986 was on infant mortality rate, malnutrition, morbidity issues, and on literacy rate between the age group of 0 to 6, aiming that the child population of India should receive all the essential services(p.7 PoA1992). Whereas if we look at NEP2020, it nowhere talks about the issues of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, etc. Rather, it directly talks about the provision of high-quality infrastructure. Also, the age group which ECCE will cater to is (3-8). Here as we see that NEP2020 has directly removed its focus from conception till the age of 3. So, can it be assumed that the issues like malnutrition, mortality, morbidity, etc. upon which NEP1986 was focussing, have been resolved so far? But as far as we look upon the statistics of UNICEF, it shows a totally different picture of India. “The reason behind 69% deaths among children below the age of 5 is malnutrition”.(UNICEF, 16/OCTOBER/2019). Also,“infant mortality rate is down by 42% in 11 years, yet higher than the global average”(Yadavar, 2/june/2019). NEP2020 states that their focus for ECCE is on underprivileged children (NEP, 2020, p.7). But they have removed children of 0-3 age group from their ambit. Among the underprivileged, this is the age group when the issues of malnutrition, etc. set in. Hence the policy seems to contradict itself.

School Readiness

Secondly,Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) “ Early Years”2019, has collected the

sample upon the competencies that international research has identified as the important predictors of future success and such competencies should be developed among children before entering Grade 1. These competencies are categorized under four domains- cognitive development, early language, early numeracy, and social-emotional development (ASER, 2019). But if we look upon such competencies and its achievement in India then the statistics are alarming as according to The National Achievement Survey of 2017, 1 of every 3 students in Grade 3 cannot read small text with comprehension, and that 1 of every 2 students in Grade 3 cannot use maths to solve daily life problems. The findings from the 2018 ASER report are even more stark - only 50% of children in Grade 5 in rural India can read a Grade 2 level text, and only 28% of children in Grade 5 can solve a division problem. But when exactly do these learning deficits begin? The ASER data from 2018 begins to reveal some answers.

For instance, 42.7% of rural Indian children in Grade 1 could not even recognize the letters of the alphabet in their medium of instruction and 35.7% could not recognize numbers from 1-9. Data from the 2017 India Early Childhood Education Impact study by Ambedkar University and ASER Centre tell us that the origins of this crisis lie even before children enter Grade 1 (ASER, 2019) Only 1 in 10 children aged 5 could match two pictures beginning with the same letter, and only 1 in 6 could complete a simple pictorial pattern. Such data clearly states that children in India are not at all school ready and by keeping it in mind NEP2020 has well focussed upon the language, literacy, and numeracy skills of children so that when they reach Grade 1 they should at least possess such basic skills.

Awareness of Stakeholders

It has also been observed that children from less advantaged homes are affected disproportionately. Although almost half of all 4-year-olds (44.2%) and more than a quarter of all 5-year-olds (26.3%) are enrolled in Anganwadis, these children have far lower levels of cognitive skill and foundational ability than their counterparts in private LKG/UKG classes. (pg49, ASER 2019)” Also, the rationale that why children going to Anganwadi have less cognitive skill than private school children is somewhere related to the education and awareness of their parents.” Overall, in this sample, about half the children have mothers who had completed eight or fewer years of schooling. Among the pre-primary age group, these children are more likely to be attending Anganwadis (or, in a small proportion of children, government pre-primary classes); whereas their peers, whose mothers studied beyond the elementary stage are more likely to be enrolled in private LKG/UKG classes (pg49, ASER

2019). The above data particularly suggests that NEP2020 should not only work on fostering the learning of children rather they should also start making efforts to spread awareness amongst stakeholders and most importantly among parents, as children spend most of their time at home and an aware parent could help raise an aware child.

Another important question is whether NEP 2020 is the only policy that talks about school readiness and awareness of stakeholders? The PoA document lays ample stress on the significance of reading, writing, and arithmetic for children which can be looked upon as parallels of the language literacy and numeracy, respectively, mentioned in NEP 2020. (POA 1992, p. 8). Also, NEP1986 very well takes care of the awareness of stakeholders as in its “Home Based Model “ (from conception to 6 years): it involves developing techniques of stimulation that can be taught to and done by parents or other members of the family to foster child development. It requires “ (i) training of local women who will play the lead role in conducting home visits and encouraging family members to conduct stimulation programs for their children, (ii) development of low-cost play materials to be used by the family, (iii) development of audio and video programs for the mass media for wide implementation, and (iv) creation of a mobile supervisory cadre”(POA1992, p13). Whereas , NEP2020 has nowhere mentioned about the awareness of stakeholders. As a researcher, I feel that when its Plan Of Action will come, it should also talk about the strategies for awareness of stakeholders as the age group which ECCE caters to is very young and the number of hours pre-school children spend at their homes is more in comparison to pre-schools. Therefore, the level of stimulation which they can get from their family members will help them more in their holistic development.

Analyzing School Enrolment Status

National Education Policy(2020) states that its goal is to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country (NEP2020 p.7). High quality here signifies high-quality infrastructure, play equipment, and well-trained Aanganwadi workers (NEP, 2020). But while looking at the data of ASER, which is one of the significant contributors for the provision of data on children's schooling enrolment status and learning across rural India, represents that since 2015, the Annual Survey Education Report (ASER) is only the annual source of information about children's foundational skills across the country, and in 2019, it was the very first time that ASER focused upon “Early Years” and included early childhood, and did the

survey on toddlers and children who belong to the age group of (4 - 8) years across 26 districts in India. But this survey was not done in all the rural districts of each state rather it was done in only one rural district of every state. ASER - Early Years ' retains the core elements of ASER architecture: it is a sample-based household survey, conducted by local volunteers, using simple and easy administer tools and formats'. Because this is a new target group for ASER, “ the survey has been conducted in one rural district per state rather than nationwide” (ASER, 2019 'Early Years' p.1). We all understand that the context of each state and various districts within each state varies a lot. Therefore, it is not a very reliable measure to generalize data collected from one rural district for the whole state. Such a step might lead one to overlook a lot of issues that are prevalent in a few or majority of the other districts within the same region. ASER provides data which represents that there is a very less enrollment rate of children in ECCE but the biggest reason behind this less enrollment is the inaccessibility of ECCE within the reach of children as we should understand that in pre-school, children are very young that they by themselves can't travel to far places for learning in pre-schools (ASER, 2019).

Preparation and Remuneration of Teachers

- NEP 2020 talks about the preparation of high-quality teachers by providing in-service training as well as pre-service training to the teachers with both online and offline modes (NEP, 2020, p. 8) which is really credible but the policy should also consider the remuneration and work conditions of pre-school teachers as in previous years there were strikes conducted by Anganwadis workers on their lower pay off services and harsh work conditions. (Sinha, 20/September/2017).

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NEP 2020 on Curriculum and Pedagogy

Pinky Yadav

Abstract

The most striking event in the field of education in the Indian context these days has been the introduction of The New Education Policy 2020. It is even more striking for this has been suddenly introduced and seemingly influenced by the ongoing pandemic and its consequent chaos. Hence, it had come up with major implications for the process of education and its various domains such as curriculum and pedagogy, to keep up with the change and requirements of the society. Any policy is aimed at developing the most progressive and well-suited provisions and practices for the concerned field, and NEP 2020 is no exception. This policy is meant for education; therefore, it speaks up for most of its aspects and domains, explicit or implicit. Nonetheless, this paper is an attempt to understand and analyse the specific section “Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable and Engaging”.

Keywords: Curriculum, Pedagogy, NEP 2020, Assessment, Experiential Learning

Background

Whenever we speak of the education of a child or an individual in general, we often mean the academic qualifications s/he possesses or in other words, what all courses and the subsequent curriculum have been undergone by him/her. This reflects the importance held by curriculum as a domain of education. Therefore, it becomes imperative for any educational system to have a sound and effective curriculum. This task is generally taken up by the governments of the country in question, which in this case is India. The recent introduction of the National Education Policy 2020 is a step in this direction. Now, this is not to say that a policy around or for education is about curriculum, rather to say that any given policy on education will have Curriculum as one of its major concerns/areas of focus.

NEP 2020 also has a separate section titled “Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable and Engaging”. The title reflects that the nature of curriculum should be such that it promotes a holistic, integrated development in an engaging and enjoyable manner. Hence the section is not just about curriculum but also about pedagogy through which any curriculum is manifested into reality. But to understand if the policy has been able to justify this aim is open to exploration by the stakeholders. Although a precise evaluation can only be done once the policy has been implemented, nonetheless, it is upon the various stakeholders to critically evaluate and analyse the document to foresee the upcoming challenges and the inherent incoherence or gaps, if any.

Pinky Yadav M.Ed. Final Year, Central Institute of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi

Introduction

“Curriculum is, perhaps, best thought of as that set of planned activities which are designed to implement a particular educational aim- set of such aims - in terms of the content of what is to be taught and the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be deliberately fostered, together with statements of criteria for selection of content, and choices in methods, materials and evaluation.” (NCERT, 2006)

Hence curriculum covers the content, pedagogy, and assessment. It can be said to be the soul of any educational or schooling process. It also suggests that there should be some coherence between the content (what ought to be taught), pedagogy (how the content ought to be taught), and assessment (how to test what has been taught); or else, the conception of curriculum might be problematic. If these three aspects do not align with each other one might never be able to devise a sound curriculum that is ready for implementation. For example, a curriculum for any vocational course will have to have content around that vocation, both theoretical and practical. The pedagogy would then require some hands-on experience and the assessment will have to have a practical component. It also suggests that curriculum is prescriptive of a major part of the educational process as what ought to be, in its very nature, as it answers the 'what ought to/should be?' questions.

NEP 2020 through a section on curriculum (pp. 11-20), not only prescribes the guidelines for curriculum creation, but also reflects its assumptions around the nature and aims and objectives of education. When it says learning should be holistic and integrated, it suggests that it assumes education to be a process for the holistic development of a person along with an integrated personality. The mention of the terms enjoyable and engaging hints at an assumption that any process which is not both or either of this, cannot be called education in its true sense. Although it is noteworthy that not everything that is engaging is necessarily joyful, neither is all that is joyful necessarily engaging. One might really enjoy watching a comedy movie but not be engaged in it either mentally or emotionally. Similarly, one might find oneself engaged in any project or assignment both emotionally and cognitively but might not be enjoying it. Hence engagement and joy cannot be essential indicators of any educational process or practise. To ensure that the educational process retains its essence and worth, as implied in the policy, it has taken and recommended various measures that are discussed ahead in the paper.

Restructuring school curriculum and pedagogy in a new 5+3+3+4 design (pp.11-12).

One of the most radical measures proposed by the policy is restructuring the school curriculum from a 10+2 model to 5+3+3+4. This step is not just an administrative reform but a radical shift in the understanding of the development of a child and the role of education in it. As reflected in the various Teacher Education courses, the most prevalent understanding of the development of children in educational psychology has been that of Piaget, based on which, the play and pre-primary grades focus more on developing gross motor skills such as holding a pencil, identifying alphabets, learning words and utterances, etc. As the grades increase, the content also progresses from simple to complex ideas. To meet up to the changes and demands of this shift, policy also proposes the introduction of some formal patterns of learning and some light textbooks at the pre-primary level. This reflects a major shift in either the understanding of development of a child and various assumptions around it; or the nature of knowledge or maybe both. The dynamics of middle school and secondary school will also significantly change. It will now have scope for learners to opt for subjects of their choice whether they fall within a stream or not, and decide a level as well (p. 13). The traditional disciplines such as science and maths will now, as proposed, have an advanced and basic level course for the same grade. This step holds major implications and assumptions around the capabilities of children, nature of knowledge within various disciplines and poses a risk to the vision of the policy that seeks to develop a specialised workforce to meet up the demand of the coming times.

A division of the discipline for the same level into a higher and standard course at secondary stage for assessment (p. 18) assumes that skills and concepts are exclusive or hierarchical in terms of level of difficulty and that learning a discipline is completely a matter of the level of difficulty it poses. It is even more intriguing that the policy rather than proposing pedagogic reforms or investment in research to devise a solution to deal with a lack of interest among students, resorts to this step. Here the onus of learning is assumed to be completely on the learner. It assumes that the learner has the complete cognitive abilities to evaluate the consequences of their decisions in the long run or have the necessary support to make an informed decision around them. Students can simply end up opting for the basic course to avoid hard work, irrational fears around the disciplines, parental and peer pressure, fear of assessment, etc. Therefore it becomes important that the policy when complemented by various other documents, such as NCFSE (as already proposed, NEP 2020, p. 17), or a Plan of Action document (if it comes), acknowledges these issues and takes appropriate measures to deal with them, such as aptitude tests, counselling, trial classes, etc. Such a step will then ensure a specialised workforce, and only then will the educational process proceed towards a holistic development of learners. Otherwise, an ill-informed decision can lead to regrets among

learners at a later stage. This stands significant in the case of courses on language as languages have a sensitive age window to be learnt between 2 to 8 years of age (Cheung et al., 2011 & NEP 2020).

Another curricular alteration that the policy offers is a reduction of content while retaining essential concepts at the core of the discipline (NEP, 2020, p. 12). The rationale offered behind this act is that it will make space for the development of critical thinking among learners. This clearly assumes that the development of critical thinking is severely affected and determined by the quantity of the content. Development of critical thinking depends on a lot of other factors such as the quality of the content, the nature of transaction, the time of engagement, and others. Moreover, engaging with essential and core concepts of the discipline does not guarantee an effective initiation into the ways of a discipline. The development of interest and aptitude in any discipline also highly depends on the pedagogic style it is transacted in. The policy, hence, speaks of experiential learning as the pedagogic practice to be adopted for this purpose (NEP, 2020, p. 12).

Experiential Learning

The policy strongly advocates for experiential learning to be the pedagogic practice or learning paradigm to be followed by all. While explaining the nature of this practice, it limits itself to “hands-on learning art integrated and sports integrated education, story-telling-based-pedagogy among others” (NEP, 2020, p. 12). While such pedagogic practices do manage to engage learners and make learning joyful, they do not, even if taken together, equate to experiential learning. Experiential learning encompasses concrete learning followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). What policy suggests as explanation of experiential learning at the most covers up the concrete learning aspect within experiential learning.

It then speaks of using this pedagogic style to achieve learning outcomes through competency-based learning. Such an understanding of curriculum is rooted in a competency based model identified by Bernstein (1996). Whereas, the vision of the policy speaks of developing a workforce, through education, that is ready to meet the demands of the contemporary times which is rooted in Instrumentalism (Scott, 2007). Such a clash in the theoretical underpinnings might lead to incoherence which will further lead to problems while it is put to practice (Soltis 1968). Moreover, this instrumentalist vision of the policy will be put to risk when there will be flexibility in choice of combination of disciplines at secondary level. This idea sure is learner-centric where s/he will have the choice to pick up randomly from the list and create a unique

combination, but it might pose a risk to the development of specialisation in a discipline among learners which is stated as a contemporary need in the vision of the policy. A learner who opts for History, complemented with Political Science or Geography will better specialise in Social Science over another who opts for History with Biology or Accounts.

The policy does acknowledge that certain skills and capacities are important for everyone to be learnt despite the question of interest and aptitude; hence it proposes curricular and pedagogic initiatives for the development of lauded ideas of scientific temper, creativity, strong moral character, that fit well within any intuitive idea of an educated person (NEP, 2020, p. 15). It still does not acknowledge the basic skills and competencies required for the mastery of any discipline/specialisation. The policy, while enlisting these educational and curricular aims, does not completely miss out on the challenges that face in their achievement; for these education/curricular aims are age-old and can be traced back to any policy on education (NPE 1986, Kothari Commission, Learning Without Burden and others). One of the major challenges that have emerged time and again in each policy or curricular reform is the issue of language diversity in India and its interplay with English as the medium of instruction.

Medium of Instruction: An emphasis on mother tongue, home and regional language

The policy proposes the medium of instruction to be either the mother tongue or the home-language or local language whichever is feasible. It is implicit that this step will favour the local regional language the most, considering which the policy uses the phrase “wherever possible” at numerous places in the section. Since it will not be possible to introduce the home language of each and every child as the medium of instruction in schools; especially, in the case of regions with high immigrant populations, the only plausible solution here would be to use the language of the majority as the medium of instruction. Complementing it, the policy has announced creation of curricular content and textbooks in local languages. Although the idea is commendable but highly far-fetched as the diversity of the nation knows no bounds. It will first require a survey of areas to understand the language dynamics, the population that speaks the language and which language. Adding to all this is the fact that numerous languages in India do not have a script such as Haryanvi, Awadhi, Himachali, etc., these are not languages. The policy also suggests that mother tongue or local or home language must be continued at the most till Class 8. Keeping in mind the language learning sensitive window, this step might turn out to be a huge setback for our education system once learners cross Class 8. Switching the medium language at such late a stage might severely affect the learning of the subject and consequently education and personality of the learners. The learners might face severe difficulties with a sudden switch in the medium language. The rationale for these steps as stated is to celebrate the

Indianness and rich cultural, regional, and linguistic diversity of India.

The most probable language in which the switch would be, after Class 8, is English, accounted for its global status. Keeping this in mind, NCF 2005 promoted the idea of language across curriculum, for the development of any language requires an exposure and practice within the sensitive age window. Hence it is important that the policy, while releasing follow up documents, ensures that the development of English is not compromised. Another rationale offered for these steps is to ensure the inclusion of all. This has been extended to the inclusion of gifted students and students with special needs. Although gifted students and students with special needs have a huge discourse, the policy has limited itself to fostering what we earlier knew of as extra-curricular skills. It suggests the formation of various circles, such as for dance and music, to organisation of various olympiads and competitions like quizzes and provision for learning material both online and off-line (p. 19). This reflects a lack of clarity on what gifted students/students with special needs entails. What the policy actually talks of under this subsection (p. 19-20) are measures for the holistic development of a child even if not gifted. Moreover, any policy must refrain from using labels of this sort, even if they are positive. Educational Psychology has provided enough evidence to highlight the perils of labelling within educational systems (Becker, 2003). Once the policy has spoken around various curricular issues and domains it moves on to the last and another crucial aspect of curriculum, which is assessment.

Vouching for 'assessment for learning' in education

The policy strongly advocates for formative, over the year assessment pattern, over year-end pen-paper summative assessment. It claims that all assessments will be rooted in assessment for learning. There would be a choice to opt for board exams, scope for improvement will also be provided and establishment and strengthening of regulatory bodies such as Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH) and NTA (National Testing Agency) for standardized tests at higher levels are also mentioned. It is noteworthy that the policy claims assessment for learning and standardized testing for filtration while admissions for various higher education institutes together (NEP, 2020, pp. 17-19). The process of filtration through assessment is completely rooted in the 'assessment of learning' paradigm. Moreover, conducting formative assessment does not ensure the practice of assessment for learning (Harlen & James, 2006). Assessment for learning requires a nuanced understanding of the learner and his/her needs. It is contextual in nature and must be learner-centric. Any common standardized test will fail to meet up to this expectation. Policy recommends the use of a descriptive progress report card of students for assessment, which is

already a common practice among a lot of private and aided schools, hence nothing new. Moreover, other than acknowledging non academic qualities and capabilities of a child, a detailed progress report seems to serve no other purpose. Nevertheless, this might for sure work as a positive reinforcement to a student.

The policy also talks of the mushrooming coaching culture, and introduction of flexible and easier board exams to counter it so that the students do not have to put in much additional effort; other than basic efforts while attending classes (NEP, 2020, p.18). This overlooks the onus of increased coaching culture that lies upon parents, schools, privatisation, changing lifestyle, and a sense of competition. An increase in coaching culture is not just limited to board and an entrance exam, which is why reforming the board system, might not turn out to be an effective strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Although the policy has attempted to recommend what's best for the nation and its education system, there is a lot that needs further explanation and elaboration. The policy, hence, needs to be complemented with further documents such as a Plan of Action, NCFSE, NCFTE, etc. The government, while drafting such documents must invite feedback on the policy from various stakeholders and duly acknowledge and accommodate the same as and wherever required. It must also ensure that the policy must then be implemented through a PoA duly revised, without any alterations. The plans and provisions then devised must be followed religiously and efficiently. Although difficult, it needs to be ensured that what the policy states is the same as what will be implemented.

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Curtailing Dropouts in School Education: An Analysis of Provisions Listed in NEP 2020

Akansha Marwah

Education is considered to be a basic requirement for human development (World Bank, 1993). It allows for enrichment of body, mind and soul as well as providing an avenue for transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next (Sajjad, Iqbal, Siddiqui, & Siddiqui, 2012). And while education covers almost “any process of learning, rearing or growing up,” (Peters, 1973, p. 238), in modern societies, schools have emerged as institutions that are dedicated to this process. Schooling system must therefore be focused on ensuring that children are enrolled and attend the same. Dropouts i.e. children who attend school but discontinue their studies due to various reasons, may serve as a deterrent to achieving that objective.

According to a report titled 'Educational Statistics at a Glance' released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (2018), the average dropout rate in India at the primary level was 4.13% while that at the secondary level was 17.06% for the year 2014-15. These percentages were even higher for girls, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. This points to how dropouts continue to be a pervasive problem facing the Indian Educational System. Thus, it becomes imperative for any National Education Policy released to focus on this issue. This essay, therefore, focuses on providing an analysis of the National Education Policy (2020) with reference to its provisions on and around dropouts at school level, by comparing those provisions with past educational policies, and finally by comparing it with other successful state initiatives.

Provisions for curtailing dropouts in National Educational Policy (NEP), 2020

In NEP 2020, only a small section is dedicated to the issue of dropouts (pp. 10-11). The policy doesn't explicitly define the same, however it seems to be operating on the understanding that dropout is “an ever-enrolled person” who “discontinued education before completing a specific level” (Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018, p. 13). For dealing with this issue, the goals listed under this section include – firstly, to bring children who discontinued their studies back into the educational fold; secondly, to prevent further students from dropping out; and thirdly to achieve the goal of 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in preschool to secondary level by 2030 (NEP, 2020, p.10). The following measures have been listed to achieve these objectives: -

Akansha Marwah M.A.(Psychology), Department of Psychology, University of Delhi,

Improving Infrastructure

One focus area of the policy for curtailing dropouts is to enhance the infrastructure in schools. For this purpose, enlarging existing schools, improving quality of facilities in existing schools, providing safe and practical conveyance and providing regular trained teachers are identified as actionable measures. In general, studies conducted in other nations, exploring the link between infrastructure with dropouts, seem to suggest that quality of school infrastructure has a significant effect on school attendance and drop-out rates (Branham, 2004; Paxson & Schady, 2002). However, there is also data to indicate that in Indian context while lack of infrastructural facilities may generate discomfort, students tend not to cite it as the main reason for dropping out (Chugh, 2011). Therefore, the effectiveness of this measure is dubious.

Furthermore, the objective of “providing safe and practical conveyance and/or hostels, especially for the girl children, so that all children have the opportunity to attend a quality school and learn at the appropriate level” (NEP, 2020, p.10), can prove instrumental in improving learning outcomes for girls as safety concerns have consistently been found to be a major factor that results in them discontinuing school (Khan, Azhar, & Shah, 2011; Shahidul & Karim, 2015). However, the effectiveness of this measure will depend largely upon whether these spaces prove to indeed be safe and more importantly, are 'perceived' as safe by the girls and their families.

Tracking student progress

In order to achieve universal participation, the policy proposes two measures- firstly, to track those who have enrolled and attended school, and secondly, to track whether students have suitable opportunities to re-enter school in case of dropping out (NEP, 2020, p.10). For this purpose, teachers, counsellors and social workers connected to schools will continuously work with students and their parents by ensuring community support (p.10). The assumption here is that community support for education, will help students attend school for longer durations. However, since the overburdening of teachers and social workers continues to be a persistent problem (Ramachandran, Pal, Jain, Shekar, & Sharma, 2005), the effectiveness of this measure is likely to depend on whether the government is able to provide enough staff to carry out such an initiative. Even then there is a possibility of resistance, as was seen when teachers went on protest in 2005 in response to the Rajasthan Government's order that teachers help in motivating couples for terminal family planning methods. These activities were resisted on the ground of them being time consuming. Another, reason quoted for the resistance was perceived partiality between teachers, wherein those with political links or

those active in trade unions were not given additional duties, leading to a general sense of resentment (Ramachandran, Pal, Jain, Shekar, & Sharma, 2005).

Ensuring Quality

The third proposed measure for curtailing dropouts, is to ensure quality of education. Such a measure may indeed prove to be useful as there is data to suggest that one of the most important factor in choice of upper primary school completion is children's reading and writing skills at the age of 12 (Nakajima, Kijima, & Otsuka, 2018). However, quality alone is not the reason why a student drops out. A plethora of socio-economic factors also play an important role.

In terms of economic factors, the work status of parents, particularly that of the father, is an important criterion, with dropout rate being higher for children with both non-working parents (Gouda & Sekher, 2014). Furthermore, children with a large family size often leave school to help supplement their parents' income by taking up work themselves (Sajjad, Iqbal, Siddiqui, & Siddiqui, 2012). The policy does not explicitly mention how to deal with such issues. However, its initiatives such as the continuation of midday meal and added provision of providing breakfast (NEP, 2020, p.9) can be seen as measures that may make education financially more attractive for students belonging to lower SES by partially mitigating the cost of schooling (Bonds, 2012).

Furthermore, in terms of social factors, considerations around different social identities are important. Due to the limited scope of the paper herein, the analysis has been limited to considerations around gender and scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, which are as follows:

Gender

In terms of gender, various factors may contribute to increased rate of dropouts amongst women. At household level, studies indicate that female students tend to drop out of school to take care of their younger siblings (Brock & Cammish, 1997). Another research indicates that in households where the mothers work, female children often drop out, to undertake responsibilities at home (Fuller & Liang, 1999). In terms of school level factors, lack of female teachers and feminine facilities in schools may contribute to increased dropouts (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Furthermore, teacher attitudes in terms of belief that boys are academically better than girls may also account for the differential outcomes. Cultural factors like safety concerns, early marriage and pregnancy may also be important to consider (Shahidul & Karim, 2015).

In current policy, these issues have not been addressed under the section of dropouts. However, some issues are touched upon in other sections, but the recommendations seem inadequate. For example, the policy does mention providing hygienic facilities for all girls and transgender students (NEP, 2020, p.26) but there is a lack of attention paid to developing an environment that allows for dealing with specific issues of women such as menstruation. Similarly, there is a lack of emphasis on provision of counselling around issues of early marriage and pregnancy which are amongst the leading reasons for girls dropping out (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). The mention of counselling in the policy is geared specifically towards “handling stress and emotional adjustments” (NEP, 2020, p.40). Only safety concerns are addressed to some extent when the policy makes recommendations for “providing bicycles and organizing cycling and walking groups to provide access” to female students (p.25).

Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, (2018), at the upper primary level for the year 2014-15, the dropout rate amongst SCs is 5.51% and that amongst STs is 8.59% as compared to 4.03% amongst the population taken as a whole. Similarly, at the secondary level these rates are 19.36% and 24.68% respectively, compared to 17.06% of the population taken as a whole. Given such data it might be fruitful to understand the reasons for the same.

Amongst Scheduled Caste, systematic discrimination at school (e.g. separate drinking pots for Dalit students) and within the community (e.g. Dalit homes being located at the outskirts of the village) contributed to reduced educational outcome for this group (Borooah & Iyer, 2005). NEP 2020 makes no recommendation to deal with the issue beside the mention of enforcing a no-discrimination policy. However, given that despite 'untouchability' being illegal in India, Dalits continue to live in segregated colonies and face rituals of 'purity' (Malik, 1999), it is unclear how the new policy would be effective.

For Scheduled Tribes, students coming from this community often drop out due to lack of suitability of present education with their culture (Prasad, 1991; Soren, 2016) and language (Soren, 2016). Therefore, the impetus of providing knowledge in local language and overhauling curriculum to make it more engaging and useful as listed in NEP, 2020 (p.10) may prove to be beneficial.

Another major reason for dropout amongst both these groups is the perception of loss of family income when children are taken out of work and put in school (Soren, 2016; Borooah & Iyer, 2005). This issue has not been addressed in NEP 2020.

Other Considerations

The discussion on curtailing dropouts, may be incomplete without considering the impact of vocational education and proposed restructuring of the school system. By increasing the status of vocational education and providing it in a phased manner, standardizing its process, and ensuring its quality, the policy aims to shift the focus of learning from rote memorization to acquisition of skills that are deemed necessary by people belonging to diverse backgrounds (NEP, 2020, pp.43-44). This is largely seen as a good move that would encourage students to enroll in schools and allow them to learn employable skills. This however, also has the potential of increasing dropouts, as students having multiple exit points from the school system due to its restructuring may opt to exit from the system once they learn the necessary skills to sell their labor. This might prevent them from reaching for higher levels of education.

The policy is also unclear on what would happen to students who do not clear the evaluation at different points in the newly structured system. While there is provision for re-taking exams (in case of Boards) and an emphasis on continuous evaluation, the policy does not clearly specify what would happen to students who fail to meet the minimum criteria in these tests. This leaves the risk for the students who 'fail' to meet the 'bar' to be pushed out in proportions higher than ever before and diverted to National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) compliant skill shops. SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims will be at higher risk for the same due to already existing disparity in learning outcomes for these groups (Sadgopal, 2016).

Comparing Provisions of NEP 2020 with other Center and State Initiatives

NEP, 1986, later complemented with a Plan of Action document in 1992, doesn't have a dedicated section on dropouts, but this theme has been discussed throughout the document. In general, there is a focus on infrastructure and quality as factors to ensure increased continuation in the school system. In this regard, NEP, 2020 goes one step further to provide actionable measures as have been analyzed above to achieve those objectives. Furthermore, the current policy through its emphasis and detailed plan for vocational education also goes one step further to act on the impetus as delineated by NEP 1986 to hold SUPW/ WE (Socially Useful Productive Work /Work Experience) programme for ensuring that those who leave schools are prepared with better skills for occupations (NPE, 1986, p. 33).

In states like Tamil Nadu, through provision of free uniforms, textbooks and laptops, as well as cash incentives, have helped reduce dropout rates. As a result, Tamil Nadu today has universal primary school attendance, and the highest gross enrolment in higher education in India (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020). NEP 2020, acknowledges the same by asserting that “various successful policies and schemes such as targeted scholarships,

conditional cash transfers to incentivize parents to send their children to school, providing bicycles for transport, etc., that have significantly increased participation of socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the schooling system in certain areas. These successful policies and schemes must be significantly strengthened across the country” (NEP, 2020, p. 25). However, no suggestion of how this objective may be achieved is provided anywhere in the policy. Hence, the Plan of Action, if and when it is realized, must focus on this area.

Concluding Remarks

- NEP 2020 lists infrastructural development, careful tracking of students' progress, and ensuring quality, as measures for curtailing dropouts at school level. These measures are similar to those listed in NEP 1986 and while important in their own right, may be inadequate to deal with the full spectrum of socio-economic reasons for dropouts. Furthermore, while focus on vocational education may encourage more students to enroll and learn employable skills, it may further perpetuate existing inequalities in learning outcomes.

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Higher Education, Scholarships and Social Mobility of Females: A Case Study of Haryana

Anjali Tiwari

Abstract

Education and social mobility are closely linked to each other as education is one of the most significant tools which can promote the growth of individuals both economically and sociologically. But the researches show that educational inequalities are persistent around the world, including India and these inequalities become more profound in the case of higher education. Females are the worst victims of these disparities. In contemporary times in India, the government has initiated many scholarship schemes for breaking this status quo and to provide opportunities for females to enter and excel into higher education. In such scenarios, it becomes significant to explore the impact of these positive interventions on females' access to higher education and their social mobility. This paper tries to explore the same in the context of females of Haryana. It is part of the doctoral study of the author titled as- 'Higher Education and Social Mobility of Females: A Sociological Study of Haryana'. In this paper, some of the scholarships provided by the Central Government have been analyzed to explore their outreach. Further, questionnaires were administered and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) were held with female students of two districts of Haryana, i.e. Mahendragarh and Jhajjar, to understand whether these positive interventions and initiatives have played any significant role in the upliftment of female students or are these just token representations given to them? After the analysis, it becomes evident that these scholarships have a moderate impact on females of the state as there are many paradoxes within the eligibility criteria and other requirements which shrink the impact of these scholarships. It was also observed that there is also dearth of information regarding these schemes among females. So, it may be inferred that the drafting and advertising of the scholarship schemes need to be introspected in detail and improved, so as to increase their impact over the females' participation in higher education.

Keywords: Females, Scholarships, Higher Education, Social Mobility, Haryana.

Introduction

In the discourse of gender equality, education has been positioned as a primary catalyst for achieving social justice and social transformation (Chanana, 1988; Abbott & Payne, 2005). The Government of India has also reiterated the same in different policy documents and reports of varied commissions and committees. For instance, the Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66 argues that **“the education of girls should receive emphasis, not only on grounds of social justice but also because it accelerates social transformation (Ministry of Education, 1966, pp-xiv).”** The report further states **“If this 'change, on a grand scale' is to be achieved without violent revolution and even for that it would be necessary) there is**

Anjali Tiwari : Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Delhi.

one instrument, and one instrument only, that can be used: Education (Ministry Of Education, 1966, pp-6).” Further, the National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) also states that “**education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of the women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favor of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women (NCERT, 1986, pp- 8).**” Similarly, number of earlier policy documents like University Education Commission 1948-49 (Ministry of Education) Committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls, 1961-1964 (Ministry of Education, 1964), Report of Education Commission 1964-66 (Ministry of Education, 1966), Towards Equality Report (Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1974) have also emphasized the role of higher education in bringing social transformation and mobility in the everyday life of females

But if we look at it statistically, it becomes evident that women have somewhat limited access to higher education, as enrolment statistics indicate that females comprise 48.63% of total enrolment in higher education (MHRD, 2019). This data may look very encouraging on the surface, but if we try to explore its intricacies then it becomes evident that participation of females in regular colleges and in professional courses, which are in high demand in the job market, is still marginal. The differences and hegemonies present in society are the main reason behind such disparities (Dhar, 2014). Many researchers have also tried to validate this argument and shared that dominant groups have greater representation in arenas of education and marginalized groups including females, have less participation in the said field. They also reiterate that inequality of educational opportunities among different socio-economic strata continues and sometimes increases too, despite an increase in educational opportunities (Varghese and Malik, 2016; Desai and Kulkarni, 2008; Hasley, Heath and Ridge, 1980). The Central Government, as well as many state governments, have taken cognizance of this social fact and tried to initiate varied **affirmative policies** to reduce educational inequality. Provision of providing scholarships to females, who are pursuing their higher education, is one such policy. This may aid in developing the chances of females entering in the field of higher education. Central government as well as majority of state governments have varied scholarships for females who are pursuing different higher education courses. In this study, the researcher tried to explore the impact of the positive interventions, like scholarships, on the

females' access to higher education and in the process of their social mobility in the context of the State of Haryana.

Rationale of the study

This research is significant due to its unique geographical location, as the state, Haryana, is adjacent to the national capital of India, i.e. New Delhi and its thirteen out of twenty-two districts come under the National Capital Region (NCR) (Source- <http://ncrpb.nic.in/ncrconstituent.html>). This geographical proximity of the state to national capital, has influence over its socio-economic milieu, as large number of people move to and from Delhi to Haryana on a regular basis for various reasons including, work and study. This two-way spatial movement of people formulates a unique socio-cultural environment, which is evident in the form of polar representations of conservative as well as progressive ideas in Haryana (Chaudhry, 2007; Kohli, 2017). These polarities of ideas are also evident in the form of participation of females in Higher Education and their social status. For instance, according to the report of All India Survey of Higher Education (2019) the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of females of Haryana is 32.4, compared to national GER of 26.3. But at the level of social equity, the state performs badly, for instance, the gender parity index of the State is 0.88 which is much lower than the national index of 0.98. Further, the cases of violence against women are also high (Teltumbde, 2012). This statistical data indicates that the females of Haryana are entering into the field of higher education in greater numbers, but it seems that they are usually not attaining self-confidence and agency to question the gender disparities existent in the society. The economic dependency might be one of the reasons for the same. Most of the people, including females who attain higher education are dependent on their parents for financial support, including their fees, books and other amenities. This dependence becomes more critical in the case of females because in patriarchal and patrilocal society of Haryana, usually people do not want to spend more money on the studies of females because they have to go to another family after marriage (Chowdhry, 1994). Aforesaid paradoxical facts prompted researcher to explore the role of scholarships in increasing the prospects of attaining higher education among the females of Jhajjar and Mahendragarh districts of the state of Haryana and how this increased participation in higher education has influenced their chances of gaining social mobility.

These two districts were selected as they are at the verge of continuum of development. On one hand, Jhajjar is one of the highly developed districts of Haryana, whereas Mahendragarh is one of the least developed districts. Further in these districts, there are differences in availability of higher education institutions too. For instance, the Central University of Haryana is located in Mahendragarh, whereas, there are two private universities in Jhajjar, but no government university is there (the colleges affiliated to the state university are present) as shared by UGC's latest details available on the website (Source- <https://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/colleges/list%20of%20colleges%20as%20on%2029022020.pdf> dated- February 29, 2020). So, these districts were considered apt to develop an overall picture of understanding the role of scholarship in paving the path of social mobility for the females of the state who are pursuing their higher education.

Research Method

This study is based on mixed method research design and has been done in two phases. In the first phase, the researcher tried to find out the details of different scholarship schemes launched by the Central Government or by Haryana government, which are exclusively available for female students, who are pursuing their higher education. But after a brief analysis of state level scholarships, it came into light that they are available for those females only who pursue their education in the state of Haryana. But many females, who are residing in these districts, are pursuing their higher education from nearby states also, so they are not entitled to avail these state sponsored scholarships. So finally, in order to bring homogeneity in the study, only the national level scholarships were chosen.

A total of 4 scholarships were selected at the initial phase, one each for each stage of higher education. One scholarship is meant for female students, pursuing Post-Doctoral studies, one is for female research scholars, and one-one each for post-graduate and undergraduate female students. Later on 2 more scholarships were also included and analyzed, which were not exclusively meant for females. Because, during the pilot study, the respondents shared about these scholarships, which some of them were availing too. So, those scholarships were also included in the study to strengthen the understanding of the process of impact of scholarships on females' higher education and social mobility. So, a total of 6 scholarships were selected for the study. After selection of the scholarships, their detailed content analysis was done to find out their aims, objectives, purpose, eligibility criteria, amount of money and target population.

In the second phase, a questionnaire was developed in collaboration with members of University of Warwick. It consisted of some closed as well as some open-ended questions. The major aim of this questionnaire was to develop the understanding in the perspectives of females about the scholarships and its impact on their higher education experiences as well as their social mobility. This questionnaire was distributed to the females of both the districts of the state of Haryana, who were pursuing their higher education. Snowball sampling technique has been used for this study, because the researcher also wished to collect data from the females who were permanent residents of Haryana but were pursuing their education from nearby states so as to develop a nuanced understanding of the impact of scholarships on their trajectories of higher education and further, on their social mobility. In addition to this, the snowball sampling technique also helped the researcher in getting varied data from consenting females residing in different parts of the district, instead of getting homogenized data from a single area on institution. At the end, the completely- filled questionnaires were collected from 100 female students (50 females from each district). The females, who were part of the sample for the study, belonged to different socio-economic backgrounds. The level of educational qualification of these females also varied from graduation to Ph.D. Following are the basic details of participants:

Table --1

Total Respondents	Respondents from Jhajjar	Respondents from Mahendragarh
100	50	50
Social Category	Respondents from Jhajjar	Respondents from Mahendragarh
Unreserved	20	18
Other Backward Caste	11	17
Scheduled Caste	10	12
Scheduled Tribe	2	0
Minority	7	3

Further, the respondents were pursuing their higher education from different colleges and universities. The diversity in the educational qualification of the respondents is as follows.

Table--2

The present course pursued by the Respondent	Respondents from Jhajjar	Respondents from Mahendragarh
Post- Doctorate	1	0
Doctorate	7	5
Post-graduation in liberal courses	10	17
Post-graduation in Professional Courses	8	3
Graduation in liberal courses	16	21
Graduation in professional courses	8	4

Further, two Focus Group Discussions (one each in both the districts) were also conducted with some of the females to understand the role of these scholarships on their prospects of higher education and social mobility.

Scholarship Schemes: The Benefits and Contestation.

A total of six scholarships were analyzed under this study, which are as follows:

- Post- Doctoral Fellowship for Women Candidates;
- Swami Vivekanand Single Female Child Scholarship for Research in Social Sciences;
- Post- Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Female Child for PG Programs;
- Central Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students;
- Junior Research Fellowship;

- Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship.

All these scholarships catered to different academic levels and social groups. For instance, the Post- Doctoral Fellowship for Women Candidates is provided by University Grants Commission (UGC). In this scheme, 100 scholarships are being awarded per year and females belonging to all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are eligible for applying under this scheme. So, it may open new avenues for those female students who are keen to go for research in the field of higher education. But the existing data of females who pursue post-doctorate is very few, which limits the impact of this scholarship.

Swami Vivekanand Single Female Child Scholarship for Research in Social Sciences is only meant for single female children who are pursuing M.Phil. or Ph.D. In a patriarchal society like India, where male child is mostly preferred because of multiple reasons including carrying of the lineage in the line of males only (Chowdhry, 2019; Gill, 2017, Chanana, 1988), it is quite rare that people opt to have a single child and that too a female. This was also evident in my data as none of the respondents was a single girl child and majority of them had either one or two siblings. The statistical representation of the same is as follows:

Table--3

Total number of siblings	Respondents from Jhajjar	Respondents from Mahendragarh
No sibling (single girl child)	0	0
Only one sister	4	2
Only one brother	26	19
More than one brother	18	24
More than one sister	5	2

Further, this scheme is only meant for the research scholars. The dominant social norm of marriage of a girl, at a particular 'apt' age, may also restrict the possibilities of many females availing this scholarship. For instance, in many parts of the country, females are married off in their early 20s (Central Statistics Office, 2017). As a result of this, mostly females of educated urban families may probably benefit from this type of scholarship program to some extent. The females from lower strata of the community or from countryside where social threads and norms are relatively patriarchal might have less chances of achieving this type of benefit.

The third scholarship which is being analyzed in this study is Post- Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Female Child which is provided to females who are pursuing Post graduation. This scholarship is available for females who are pursuing their master's degree in non-professional courses only, which gives a slight indication that the government as well as the education system wish to promote the females towards particular streams and want to keep them away from STEM Courses (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The dominant Victorian ideology is also responsible for this kind of biased representation of females in varied higher education courses (Allender, 2016). Still, this scholarship provides a good footing to those females who are unable to pursue professional courses due to multiple reasons including social and economic constraints. It gives them new opportunities to make their career in non-professional courses and to gain social mobility to certain extent. This is evident in terms of increase in the participation of females in the field of teaching and law (Government of India, 2019).

The fourth scholarship included in the study is the Central Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students, which is provided by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD). As 50% scholarship are reserved for the female students, that is why, it opens new avenues for them in the field of higher education and later in employment sectors also. Further, the area of reach of this scholarship is wider than other schemes and scholarships which are being studied. But in the questionnaire and Focused Group Discussion, the female respondents of marginalized groups shared that, most of the families use this scholarship amount for the marriage of the beneficiary female instead of spending it on her higher education. One respondent shared during the Focus Group Discussion- **“Humare/ pados/ mein/ ek/ ladki /hai./Padhne/ mein /bahut/ achi /hai/. Usko /scholarship/ milti/ thi,/ islie/ pados/ ke// college mein/ uska/ admission/ kara /diya./ Wo/ jati/ thi/ hafte/ mein /ek/ do/ baar./ Uske/ parents/ bahut /khush /hue. /Par /usko/ wo paise/ nahi/ milte/ the,/ wo/ uske/ mummy-papa/ uske/ account /mein/ jama /rehne/ dete/ the,/ kehte the /Teri/ shaddi /mein/ kaam/ ayenge.”** (One girl used to live in our neighborhood. She was good at studies. She was getting a scholarship, so her parents got her enrolled in a nearby college. She used to go to college once or twice a week. Her parents were happy. But she was not getting the money.

Her parents used to keep the money and used to tell her that this money will be utilized in her marriage). This shows that dominant social norms are still impeding the educational prospects of females, even if the scholarships are available for them.

Apart from these scholarships, which are directly or specially meant for females, there are some other scholarships also which are not exclusively meant for them only. Two of them are Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship (RGNF), which were analyzed after having pilot study with females, as they were beneficiaries of this scholarship. 6 respondents were availing JRF and 4 were getting RGNF. After analysis of the scholarship schemes it became evident that the area of reach of this scholarship, the number of beneficiaries and the amount disbursed under this scheme is higher than other scholarships.

In this way, all these scholarships have their own benefits and contestations, which have an impact over their reach to females. These contestations also influence the opportunities of females for gaining higher education and of attaining social mobility. In the later part of the study, the researcher tried to understand the perspective of females of Haryana towards these scholarships and their impact on the process of their social mobility through the data collected from the questionnaire and focus group discussion.

Awareness Regarding Fellowship Schemes: A Major Hindrance

The respondents were asked to share whether they were availing any kind of scholarship or had availed any previously. In response to this, 87% respondents shared that they have not availed any scholarship till date. Six respondents were availing JRF and 4 were getting RGNF. From this data, it may be inferred that, despite the variation in the level of education, majority of the respondents were not getting any kind of scholarship. Further, a list of different scholarships was included in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to select the scholarships about which they were aware. But only marginal respondents had awareness about those scholarships. Further, some respondents shared that some of their family members and relatives are taking coaching to clear the exams for these scholarships. But they were oblivious about other scholarships.

This question was also discussed during focus group discussion and majority of the participants shared that if they would have known about these scholarships, then it would have been beneficial for the larger group. The females who belonged to rural areas were more uninformed about these scholarships and shared that they do not get any information about these kinds of scholarship schemes from anywhere. From these responses, it can be inferred

that there is lack of information proliferation between the central/state institutions and its students.

It also came out in discussion with females that there is a lack of promotion of these scholarships and incentives from the side of government. The lack of advertisement and promotion of these initiatives from the side of government machineries may be one of the prominent reasons for this kind of ignorance and unawareness. Due to this, most of the female students do not have awareness about these schemes and incentives. This may negatively influence the females' access to higher education. Females, who have some information about these incentives, excel in higher education to some extent. But those who are not able to get hold of these types of information are more prone to remain outside the arena of higher education, due to which dispersion of higher education among females remains somewhat limited.

Scholarships: Facilitator for Attaining Higher Education in Patriarchal Society of Haryana

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to share their views about the impact of any kind of financial support, like scholarship, on a female's social position and personality. In response to this, 98% respondents had the view that scholarships have a positive interventionist role in females' access and excel in higher education. They explained that in patriarchal society like 'ours', boys have special privileges as they are portrayed as breadwinners of the family. As a result of this, more money is spent on their education. In such scenario, economics takes center stage in the case of females' education, so scholarship schemes, which provide monetary benefits to female students, help them in excelling in their higher education, i.e. with the help of these scholarships, females gain some freedom to acquire higher education. These ideas were also reiterated by the participants of the Focus Group Discussions. One respondent shared- **“choran/ ne/ hi /padhawe/ hain/ yahan/ te,/ mere/ bhai/ ne/ padhan/ khatir/ Bangalore/ bhej /diya,/ par/ maine/ boli/ ki/ papa/ manne/ bhi/ graduation/ karan/ khatir/ Delhi/ jana/ hai/ to/ naat ge/. Bole/ ke/ karegi/ Delhi/ jaake/, yade /hai/ na /padh/ le/. Faltu/ ke/ paisa/ ko/ ne./Tere/ byah/ khatir/ rakhein/ hain. /Byah/ paache/ jitna/ marzi /padh/ liye/. Agar/ manne/ koi /scholarship/ mil/ jaave/ to/ padhai/ karana/ aasaan/ ho/ jawega/. Kisse/ tee/ paisa/ koni/ mangne/ pade”** (Families only allow boys to study; they sent my brother to Bengaluru for study. But, when I told them that I want to go to Delhi to pursue my education, they denied. They said that they do not have money. They are collecting money for my marriage. I can study after my marriage too. If I get

any kind of scholarship, then it will be easy for me to study further. I will not have to ask for money from others).

Some of the respondents, who were availing one of these scholarships shared about the changes which they felt after gaining these scholarships. They said that they feel more confident and take their education more seriously. Further, they also shared that, this financial independence has also improved their status and say in the decisions within the family which is a sign of their upward social mobility. During Focus Group Discussion also, the females were vocal about the impact of scholarships in making them more independent. One respondent who was availing the scholarship quoted that:

“Jab/ maine /ye /scholarship/ leni/ start/ ki,/ aur/ haath/ mein/ paise/ aaye/, to/ mujhmein// bada confidence/ aa/ gaya/. Ab/ kisi/ pe/ depend /nahi/ rehna/ padta/. Ghar/ pe /bhi/ log/ sunte/ hain./ Pehle/ to/ kehte/ the /shaddi/ kar/ le/, shaddi/ kar/ le./ Par/ ab/ kehte/ hain/ padhai/ puri/ kar/ le,/ koi/ ne”. (When, I got this scholarship and gained money, I attained confidence. Now, I do not depend on others for money. Now, my family also listens to me. Earlier, they used to force me to get married. But now they say that I should complete my studies first.)

So, it can be inferred that these scholarships are making their mark in opening the prospects of gaining higher education among the females of Haryana through attaining financial independence. They see it as a way of challenging the dominant patriarchal norms, of spending less on females' education.

Scholarships: A Way Forwards Towards Social Mobility of Females of Haryana

Some of the respondents of the questionnaire shared that the scholarships gave not only financial independence to them, rather they also gave them strength and courage to even break their geographical barrier. Now, they are studying in different states of India. Further, these scholarships are also making them more critical about the dominant gender stereotypes. This was evident from their response to the question- **“Does scholarship make females strong to question the society? Elaborate”**. In response to this, 86% respondents shared that they see scholarship as a potent source of bringing social change in their life. One of the respondents wrote in the response- **“Scholarship makes a woman confident. The money which they get every month helps them in fighting against odds. She can delay her marriage to a certain extent. She can ask her family to allow her to study further. This is a big achievement.”** In this way, one may infer that these scholarships give strengths to females to create a niche for

themselves in this gendered society.

This question was further discussed during Focused Group Discussion and many respondents shared that in a patriarchal society like that of Haryana, where chauvinistic institutions like Khap Panchayat are very active, it is very tough for females to attain higher education, but these scholarships can facilitate the entry of females into higher education and may also give them strength to question these gendered notions. One participant quoted that- **“Mahre/ yahan/ choriyan/ ne/ padhave/ the/ hain,/ but/ kahve/ hain// ki pass// ke college/ mein /chali ja./ Aur/ aapne/ toh/ sunni/ hogi/, Khap /Panchayat/ wali/ baat,/ ladkiyan/ ne/ phone// na/ do,/ jeans/ na/ pehnan/ do./ Aap/ hi /bolo/, ladkiyan/ kis/ tariyan/ jaave/. Par/ jin/ choriyan/ ne/ pissa /mille/ hai,/ unhaan/ ne/ koi/ na/ rok/ sakta./ Gharwale /bhi/ unka/ saath/ deve/ hain/. We/ pad /sakein/ hain,/fer/ naukri/ bhi/ kar/ sakein/ hain/ aaram/ se/. Toh/ fellowship/ ladkiyan/ ne /majboot/ banave/ hai/, in/ dangaran/ te/ ladan/ khatir,/ ki/ jeans/ pehnan/ te /aur/ phone/ raakhne/ se/ kimme/ na/ hota.”** (In our society females are allowed to study, but families say that you should go to the nearby college only. And you have also listened about the Khap Panchayat dictat, that females should not be given phones and should not be allowed to wear jeans. Now, you tell me, how can females go to college now? But the females who get money, nobody can stop them. Their families also support them. They can study and may work also in future. So, these fellowships make them strong to fight against these animals that wearing jeans and carrying phones does not make any difference.) So, these scholarships help in bringing criticality among the females regarding gender stereotypes to a certain extent.

These scholarships not only affect the life of those females who avail them, rather it also influences the life of others in the vicinity to certain extent. During Focus Group Discussion, many respondents shared that the females who get scholarship also act as role models for other females of the area. They also motivate other females to pursue their dream of gaining higher education, as many of the respondents shared that they admire those females who are availing scholarships and they themselves will work hard to gain them. One participant quoted- **“Mere/ pados/ mein/ ek/ ladki/ hai/, jisko/ paisa// milta/ hai./ Roz /college/ jati/ hai./ Padhne/ mein/ bhi/ achi/ hai./ Pados mein/ sab/ usse/ puchne/ jaate/ hain/ kuch/ bhi /puchna/ hota/ hai /padhai-likhai/ ka/ toh./ Mujhe/ bhi/ uske/ jaisa/ ban na/ hai./ Try/ karongi.”** (There is one girl in my neighbourhood, who gets the money (scholarship). She goes to college daily. Everybody asks her for help regarding education. I also want to be like her. I will try). In this way, these scholarships not only facilitate the social mobility of the beneficiary female, but also acts as a positive interventionist in motivating other females too to

move up on the ladder of education and to gain self-confidence. So, one may infer that, scholarships can play a pivotal role in bringing social change in society.

Concluding Remarks

Many scholarship schemes have been introduced from time to time by the Central Government of India for the overall upliftment of females through providing more and more opportunities of availing higher education and to further their mobility in society. Some of these scholarships have been analyzed in this study. During the analysis of these scholarships and schemes, it was found that there are varied paradoxes within them which reduce their target group as well as their impact on the higher education's prospects of the females of Haryana, as far as these two districts (Jhajjar and Mahendragarh) are concerned. Most of them are meant either for single girl child or marginalized communities. There are only a few scholarships like Central Scheme for College and University Students and Junior Research Fellowship which are available for all male and female candidates (with some age restriction) irrespective of their socio-cultural and economic background. Due to this, female candidates, belonging to large families or unreserved categories, lag behind in availing these scholarships. This is also evident from the statistics because majority of the respondents (87) were not availing any kind of scholarship.

Further, their impact is also hampered by the dominant social norms. For instance, the norms of passing on the lineage through males, leads to proliferation of various evils like female foeticide and female infanticide. This is more severe in the state of Haryana, which has an adverse sex ratio. Further, the socio-cultural scenario of Haryana restricts the spatial mobility of females to a large extent and limits their roles and responsibilities within the periphery of home. The socio-cultural institutions like Khap Panchayat further promotes these kinds of gender stereotyping. The recent orders of Khap Panchayats of banning girls from wearing jeans and using mobile phones are examples of the measures used by the community to restrict the mobility of females (Ahlawat, 2012). In such scenarios, it becomes difficult to gain access to these kinds of opportunities provided by the Central Government to gain financial assistance for excelling in higher education. So, the government also needs to take steps to eradicate these kinds of social evils which restrict the path of social mobility of females.

Further, from the questionnaires' responses and Focus Group Discussion with females of Jhajjar and Mahendragarh districts of Haryana, it has been found that scholarships play a crucial role in improving the females' access and excel in higher education. This also helps them in paving the way for success in their life and they also become role models for their

future generation. So, scholarships, which provide monetary assistance to females, somehow reduces the 'burden' of the family and they manage to allow them to go for higher education. Further, these types of scholarships also help them in gaining self- respect and motivate them to attain success in life. This also gives them strength to create their own destiny in their own ways. But the path to reach these scholarships is tough, and one of the most important reasons behind this is lack of information provided by the government machineries regarding these scholarships.

Further, varied social stereotypes and norms, including early marriage, patrilocality, preference of male child etc. also obstructs the impacts of these scholarships on females' higher education and further in their social mobility too. These social stereotypes become more severe in the case of Haryana, which is evident in the form of adverse sex ratio and dominance of Khap Panchayats in the socio-cultural matters. In patriarchal societies like that of Haryana, the families usually prefer to spend more money on the education of males as they are traditionally seen as the main source of income and future breadwinner of the family. Further, families also perceive investment on women's education as a non-refundable one because in patrilocal societies females move to another family after marriage (Chanana, 2001). So, the females of Haryana have more challenges and barriers which they need to cross for excelling on the path of higher education and furthering their social mobility.

This study is of very short duration and is done with a slightly small sample size of female students of only two districts of Haryana, so in this study there is a lesser chance of generalization of inferences. Despite that, this study may help in creating a nuanced understanding of the impact of these scholarship schemes on the female students and consequently on their social mobilization. Further, if the government machineries will try to promote these scholarships and schemes to all nooks and corners of the society by the help of print and electronic media, then it will be more beneficial for females. Further, social norms also need to be questioned and modified so that females can attain their spaces in higher education institutions and could become strong enough to write their success stories with greater self-confidence.

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Dealing with Subjectivity and Aiming for Higher Validity in Qualitative Research

Shweta Tewari

Dhananjay Joshi

Abstract

The present research paper talks about the need and importance of qualitative research and how it undertakes pertinent issues and problems which are beyond the scope of quantitative researches focusing only upon quantification and scoring. Qualitative researches aim towards developing an in-depth understanding and description of the phenomena being studied and hence employ strategies and techniques that are largely purposive in nature and make use of narratives and interviews as tools in most cases. However, researchers who are experts with quantitative approaches often raise questions about the validity aspect in qualitative researches owing to the subjectivity involved. This has been discussed in detail in this paper and also suggestions given by eminent researchers, obtained through an extensive literature review, have been presented to eliminate bias from qualitative study and achieve high standards of validity. Subsequently, some teacher educators teaching in higher education institutions of Delhi and engaging in research supervision at the Masters and PhD level have also been interviewed to know their perceptions about how qualitative studies should be undertaken at the university level and what could or should be done to have better standards of qualitative research studies especially with regard to the validity aspect.

Keywords: Qualitative, Research, Subjectivity, Validity in Qualitative Research

Every research targets towards fulfillment of certain purposes and answering of research questions which are specified by laying down the research objectives that direct the researcher to decide the nature of the research and the methodologies to be adopted to fulfill them. Qualitative research is concerned with studying and understanding quality, illuminate, discern or study totality and meanings of phenomena, cases, processes, human behavior etc. in detail and in depth instead of trying to resort to quantifying, scoring, measuring them or finding their frequency or intensity as in the Quantitative research. (Creswell, 2009)

Crotty (1998) calls this classification of researches into these two broad categories as 'the great divide' (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006). History has witnessed an emphasis for quantification in research methodologies since early times and no doubt that is why the fields such as mathematics, physics have ruled during the positivist paradigm and consequently kept inspiring most researchers to adopt quantification in their researches. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Even the present times witness a more acceptable attitude for quantitative studies than qualitative in the educational institutes. (Anney, 2014). While quantification has always been

Shweta Tiwari : Research Scholar, GGSIPU

Prof. Dhanjay Joshi : Head and Dean, School of Education, GGSIPU, Dwarka New Delhi.

associated with verification of hypothesis, accuracy of facts , objectivity and use of statistical methods to calculate and infer, quantitative researches have no room for considering or including accounts of researcher reflexivity and considers bias as criminal and detrimental to validity of the research. Moving through the post positivist period, the researchers however began to feel that every research could not be restricted to quantification and some also required a deep understanding and meaning making from phenomena under study , instead of producing mere generalizable statements of relationship between the variables.

Definition

Gay and Arasian (2000) define Qualitative Research as “the collection of extensive data on many variables over an extended period of time, in a naturalistic setting , in order to gain insights, if not possible using other types of research.”

Evolving Paradigms :How a shift occurred from extreme positivism

The term 'paradigm' has been derived from the word 'paradeigma' that was first coined by Thomas Kuhn referring to a common pattern or model under which the researchers work. The shift in the focus in research methodologies from prevalent stringent objective procedures under the positivist paradigm to lesser stringent ones in the postmodern positivist paradigm to critical paradigm and finally into the present constructivist paradigm with more dialogical and dialectical methodologies, can be well understood by making an attempt to answer the basic ontological , epistemological and methodological questions related to the treatment of reality such as what exists , how it can be studied , what is the role of the researcher in studying reality and which methodologies are best suited for such a study. (Morrow, S 2005). While researchers of the positivist paradigm dwelled on much quantifiable aspects and believed more in the objectivity of the researchers and always attempted to know the objective reality through verification or falsification of hypothesis, postmodern positivist paradigm researchers, on the other hand, used more or less the same method but were more open to qualitative aspects such as meaning , case studies etc. (Morrow,2005). It was in the critical paradigm, that the researchers believed more in the fact that reality was shaped by values and their methods were dialogical and dialectical and hence largely qualitative. Consequent to this, the constructivist paradigm followers believed in the constructed reality and their researches had purely subjective or qualitative methods of data collection. These changing paradigms and a gradual and more acceptance of qualitative researches has helped paving the way for more people trying to study complex social and cultural issues and explore unexplored

areas using qualitative methodologies. (Morrow,2005).

Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Let us now see the other major differences between Quantitative and Qualitative researches:

- 1. Meaning versus Scores:** Since the quantitative researches focus upon the quantification, most data is in the form of scores and numbers, whereas in a qualitative research study, the focus is to develop understanding, extract broad meanings, provide explanations, descriptions that cannot be done by quantification (Morrow , 2005).
- 2. Researcher's Role:** In a quantitative study, the researcher is independent with respect to the research processes and is expected not to have any kind of relationship with the subjects or participants. Absolute objectivity of the researcher is the basic requirement for meeting validity standards of the research, whereas the researcher in a qualitative study is a research instrument himself/herself. (Anney, 2014). He/she, in order to study the human elements, often requires being a part of the culture or the environment to be studied and hence have relationship with the participants and the environment. This relationship is not encouraged by quantitative researchers. (Jones , Torres & Arminio , et. al 2006).
- 3. Research Questions:** In quantitative researches, the Research questions are made on the basis of predicted relationship between the variables or by operationalization of variables. In qualitative researches, they are formulated in situ. (Cohen , Manion & Morrison et. al , 2005).
- 4. Role of Literature Review:** Literature review plays a greater role in a qualitative study than in a quantitative study. The researches done in the past, theories emerged from them and the multitude of perspectives and findings about the phenomena have to be studied in order to understand the context of the research and understanding the influences on the phenomena being studied. In a quantitative study, however, the role of literature review is to verify a hypothesis through controlled experimentation and hence controls are set up with structured methodologies. (Jones, Torres & Arminio , et. al 2006).
- 5. Prediction:** The results in a quantitative study are derived through hypothesis testing or, in other words, testing the relationship between the variables or prediction about cause and effect is the purpose here. However, in a qualitative study, the data is in the

form of narratives, interviews or observations from the human subjects which cannot be quantified but understood, and hence prediction is not considered as one of the purposes in qualitative study. However, the various theories in the literature review are studied to understand the important issues just to help in forming patterns or themes for schedules of interview and other forms of data collection in a qualitative research. However, similarity in results can be expected but not assured in similar contexts. (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006).

6. **Repeatability** : Quantitative researches and scientific researches conducted in experimental laboratories can be repeated or replicated under the same controls or conditions over the same subjects or sample, but replication is difficult to attain in case of a qualitative research, as subjects being human beings have minds and behavior that are dynamic and complex. The same subjects over even a little period of time, may report changes in their perceptions, interpretations about things, attitudes and other human constructs which may alter results of the same research conducted with exactly same methodology and same research tools. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). However, similarity in results can be achieved in qualitative researches conducted with the same methodologies under similar contexts. But absolute repeatability is unattainable (Olivia, 2016).
7. **Generalization of Findings**: Generalization is an important objective of the researches that are scientific or quantitative in nature and methodology, whereas it is not a major purpose in qualitative research. The results of a qualitative research can be applicable into similar settings or contexts that can be comparable. However, qualitative researchers, as they are more interested in studying uniqueness, or describing things or understanding phenomena or human elements etc. than deriving universal principles or generalizing results of their findings. However, similarities over contexts may appear and can be studied. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2010).
8. **Methods**: The quantitative methods are generally based upon statistical analysis and are based on manipulation of variables in a controlled experimental set up with randomization. However, in a qualitative research, the rule for choice of method is primarily 'fitness for purpose'. The qualitative researchers may adopt one or several methods along with several kinds of triangulation (space, method, time etc.) to thoroughly study a qualitative construct and understand meanings. Thus, sampling is mostly purposive and researcher attempts to obtain details and maximum information

from the participants for better understanding of the phenomena. Adoption of several methods (triangulation) is employed to achieve theoretical saturation and ensure that all important meanings have been drawn and understood in depth and nothing is left out to be studied. (Yilmaz, 2013).

9. **Sample size:** Since a quantitative research involves hypothesis testing and also involves a lot of numbers and statistical analyses, the requirement for the sample size needs to be at least 30 or more for probabilistic treatment of variables, however the size of the sample is not exactly specified in a qualitative research and theoretical saturation and the need of the study. The purpose of the research has to be met. (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenet, 2011).
10. **Context :** Quantitative researches are context free whereas qualitative researches are context bound. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since the researchers employ several controls in a quantitative research and work in an experiment, context of a research plays not much of a role here and the research is expected to be replicable in all cases and situations. In qualitative researches, however, context cannot be ignored because the data in qualitative researches is in the form of the human accounts and thus the context, culture, situation, human behavior etc. all influence the data and thus differences and similarities across them lead to differences and similarities across contexts. (Yilmaz, 2013; Jones, Torres & Arminio 2006).
11. **Realities:** The researches adopting the quantitative methodologies or approach in their research work, are of the belief that reality is objective and one (Anney, 2014) and can be researched or studied objectively with only an etic approach. Whereas, the researchers under qualitative domain, reject the notion of one reality and conform to the idea of subjective reality perceived differently by human beings and hence talk about co-constructed and multiple realities and perspectives (Anney, 2014) that has to be studied mainly through emic approaches. (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2006; Anney, 2014).
12. **Settings:** Qualitative researches are conducted in natural settings by generally becoming a part of the culture. The study requires researcher to enter the field, learn the language, engage in rapport building, conduct in depth interviews or observations. Quantitative studies, on the other hand, do not always require such efforts and are carried out in controlled experimental set ups. (Creswell, 2012).

13. **Sampling:** We generally opt for a strict random sampling procedure in a quantitative study in order to avoid a bias, but in a qualitative research, purposive sampling is mostly adopted to ensure the context, factors, phenomena, characteristics or people to be studied, that are included in the study. Other forms of sampling such as extreme case sampling, convenience sampling, opportunistic sampling, theoretical sampling, snowball sampling etc. are also used. (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenot, et.al 2013)
14. **Hypothesis:** A quantitative study verifies or tests a hypothesis formed after a review of literature or theoretical perspective whereas in a qualitative research, the hypothesis testing is not often required and is not done in most cases, as the aim is to generate theories and hypothesis and not test or verify them. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, et .al 2005)
15. **Theory:** The role of theory differs in a quantitative as well as qualitative theory. In a quantitative research, theory is used as a framework for the research and it is tested using tools and techniques, hence deduction is applied whereas, in a qualitative study the aim is not to test but generate a theory (Creswell, 2009). Here theory is meant to identify the important issues, know about frequently asked major research questions, and form patterns and based on these findings, from literature review, choose and formulate appropriate interview schedules or observation schedules. Hence the researcher proceeds inductively. Quantitative researches are mostly deductive in nature, while some qualitative are also deductive. In a qualitative research, instead of deduction, induction is more commonly used. (Yilmaz, 2013).
16. **Values:** Qualitative researches are value bound and the researchers keep into account the value system, study and include that in the research (Yilmaz, 2013). Whereas quantitative researches are considered to be value free and the researchers' efforts are to keep them away from the research work and be thoroughly objective. (Morrow, 2005; Jones, Torres & Arminio 2006).
17. **Language :** The researchers use very formal, standardized language with more definitions and terms in quantitative researches and there is no room for a personal language or account. Whereas, in a qualitative research, on the other hand, a more informal, personal language can be used to help in accurate descriptions and detailed accounts of phenomena. (Yilmaz, 2013).

18. Emic vs etic approach(Role of researcher/participants): The quantitative researches are mostly etic in nature as they set fixed criteria to study /test hypothesis or theories and keep the perspectives of the observers aside and view from outside in a neutral manner, whereas qualitative researches mostly apply emic approaches studying things from the participants' or subjects' perspectives. (Morris, Leung, Ames & Lickel,1999)

Terminology used commonly for -Qualitative versus Quantitative

Each paradigm under which the researcher works, generally adopts a specified language that is more common to that particular paradigm and conveys the implicit assumptions, methodologies and addressing the issues within the same paradigm.

S.no	Quantitative	Qualitative
1.	Generalizability	Comparability
2.	Validity	Authenticity
3.	Internal validity	Credibility
4.	External validity	Transferability
5.	Etic	Emic
6.	Nomothetic	Idiographic
7.	Reliability	Dependability
8.	Objectivity	Conformability
9.	Sample	Participants
10.	Variable	Codes, Themes
11.	Results	Discovery , Findings , Meanings .

(Author& Diwaker, 2019 ; Lincoln & Guba,1985 ;Yilmaz, 2013 &Morrow , 2005)

Problems with Quantification and the need for Qualitative study

1. Quantitative studies often ignore elements like intentions, motives, feelings, attitude, perceptions, interest etc. which are an integral part of humans and affect every individual and their functioning. Although researches in the quantitative areas attempt to quantify some human elements also such as attitudes, interest etc. it becomes difficult to understand these concepts without a detailed description as many of such factors cannot be quantified. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
2. Just as human elements are ignored, social elements, interaction and relationships are not taken into account on the pretext of subjectivity by the quantitative

researches as the researchers here believe in objective reality and not any form of co-constructed reality. This eliminates the possibility to study the complex and essential social relationships which cannot be quantified but only understood. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Understanding a phenomena in a holistic manner is difficult with a quantitative methodology as quantitative studies only undertake testing or verifying hypothesis and generalizing the results and do not encourage an in-depth understanding or explanation of a phenomena.(Yilmaz, K .2013).
4. The context in a quantitative study is not taken into consideration as the purpose of the research is to test the hypothesis and report results that are expected to be generalizable across all contexts and situations. In this process, often the complex issues pertaining to the differences in contexts remain neglected, assuming that they do not affect the stakeholders in any way, while in reality they may strongly do so.(Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
5. The purpose of quantitative researches is to obtain valid results that can be generalized, and hence individual cases are treated as errors or chance cases and not included or accounted for. Therefore, in depth study of individual cases cannot be done by quantitative researches, leading to loss of valuable information that a single case can provide to research results.(Lincoln& Guba, 1985)
6. Since the quantitative researches furnish results in the form of numbers or present facts and do not describe feelings, personal accounts or direct data from participatory lens ,studies for emancipation cannot dwell on quantitative researches. However, qualitative researches such as critical theory can help in understanding problems of injustice and help bring a change by providing the world an access to a direct account of their sufferings or oppression in their own words. (Elizondo, Alberto, Zavala, Olga, Alvarado, Olivia, Suazo & Verónica, 2013); (Jones , Torres & Arminio , 2006).

Issues and challenges in a Qualitative Research and the need of Qualitative Research cannot be ignored

- Every researcher, being a human has his/her own personal views, perceptions and experiences and these are bound to influence the research, often not intentionally, but by chance. The accounts of the participants at the early stages

of research can lead to preconceived notions and feelings of sympathy, love, hate or a biased attitude influencing or motivating the researcher from hiding or modifying the actual results. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005).

- There is still a lack of acceptance for qualitative research in the research communities as most experts appointed in selection boards or panels of universities have more affinity for quantitative approaches owing to their own experience and expertise in quantitative than qualitative topics of research and do not approve of research proposals with qualitative methodologies. (Anney, 2014; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenet, 2011). Also, lack of explicit and concrete guidelines makes it confusing and difficult for researchers to come to a definite solution as to what the exact sample size should be. (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenet, 2011).
- Halo effect occurs when the knowledge of the subject being researched by the researcher, comes in the way of the research, as the participants start behaving or responding differently and do not furnish genuine or accurate information. (Creswell, 2012).
- The data in qualitative research, which is acquired through in-depth and open-ended interviews, is highly subjective and has often detailed accounts of the respondents including the finest details of every emotion, feeling, perception that is considered to be crucial for research. But an unbiased and objective representation, analysis and manipulation of such data requires research expertise. (Yilmaz, 2013).
- When the researcher doesn't belong to the community and is not acquainted with the culture or language or the place /field of research, he/she may find interaction and rapport building with the respondents a bit challenging. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005)
- Qualitative researches often deal with data which is sensitive and requires personal interaction under utmost confidentiality. A lot of participants either do not cooperate or furnish incomplete details or may also display anger, emotional outbursts etc. which causes a setback to the research. (Creswell, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this concern as 'Integrity Concern' about whether the information furnished by the participants is true or not. (Anney, 2014).

- Deciding the sample size has to be done very carefully in a qualitative research as there is no set rule for sample size for a qualitative study and the researchers generally prefer to follow a 'fitness for purpose' approach or methodology.(Yilmaz , 2013). The exact size of the sample is undecided and unfolds during research, depending upon the judgement and negotiation of the researcher and the demands of the study , theoretical saturation being the desired criteria.(Marshall, Cardon , Poddar , & Fontenet , 2011).Hence the researcher needs to be careful about how much data to collect and how many people to interview or observe, so as to reach a stage where no further categories during analysis are found. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison , 2005)

* Interpreting data also requires the researchers to set aside their own perceptions and prevent biases from interfering with the process of interpretation and reporting of results. Interpreting the data requires careful and repetitive reading and carefully examining new categories or themes and avoiding any overlooking of categories and including all data, even if it does not seem convincing to the researcher. (Morrow,2005).

Strategies to achieve high validity in Qualitative Research

- Qualitative research entails a prolonged engagement and is a time taking procedure of data collection in the form of long observations or in-depth interviews .These researches require the researcher to engage in participant inquiry and remain in the field for a long period. Valid data can be obtained if collected over a long period of participation (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Anney , 2014).
- Transparency in reporting the results is of primary importance and it includes a clear and unbiased explanation of constructs and contexts of the research and making everything overt to the participants about the research objectives and later the results to the research community. (Creswell, 2012).Any kind of deception or devious behavior is a threat to the research's authenticity. (Author & Diwaker , 2019 ; Noble & Smith , 2015 ; Choudhari, 2004).
- Considering that it is not possible to completely remove human elements of biases or subjectivity in data collected through interviewing human beings , the researcher must make his /her own experiences, positions , background , changes in his /her attitudes and perceptions over the course of research overt to the outside world in the study-- a process known as reflexivity .(Noble & Smith , 2015 ; Morrow , 2005;(Author & Diwaker , 2019)

- Negative case analysis is an effective strategy to improve the rigour of the study. In this method, the researcher analyses and reports in detail (makes overt) negative case or cases which yield results contrary to his/her expectations, consequently modifying and strengthening his/ research questions and methodology if the need is felt. (Anney, 2014)
- In a qualitative research, a good idea is to go back after the completion of the research to the participants and seeking their views to check for consistency between their problems and the results reported, and to see if the research has a capability for emancipation or to bring about solutions to the problems researched in the research study. (Noble & Smith, 2015; (Author & Diwaker, 2019). This is also known as 'member checking' and helps in establishing the trustworthiness of the study by helping the participants pointing out any inconsistency or bias that the researcher may have unintentionally let in the study. (Anney, 2014).
- The researchers should involve experts or knowledgeable people from other disciplines or from within or outside the field who have expertise and interest in research methods and can help co-analyse the data in order to cross check for biases, discrepancy. Co-analysis can be helpful for more validity in research. (Anney, 2014)
- Triangulation or employing more than one method of data collection, and repeating the research in a different space and time frame, can help in confirming the validity of the results obtained. (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Anney, 2014; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, et.al 2005).
- Bracketing or eliminating one's own assumptions, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes in a research work or making a bracket mind map can also be done in order to make hidden perceptions explicit and thus preventing them from influencing the results. (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Noble & Smith, 2015)
- Peer debriefing, a reflective process, is done to ensure validity and reliability of the qualitative research in which the researcher involves some peer with interest or knowledge to check, clarify and suggest at various stages of the research for a neutral opinion to bring about verification of conclusions, clarification of doubts and correction of mistakes that may have been overlooked. (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Noble & Smith, 2015; Hail, Hurst & Camp).
- The researchers, pursuing qualitative research, engage in interviewing the respondents where some may furnish incomplete or wrong information, some may appear to be

overenthusiastic and try to mislead the researcher by providing false or irrelevant information. Therefore, care should be taken to identify genuine, and cooperative respondents who satisfy the criteria for participation in the research and furnish correct information for the research. (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Morse, 1994).

- Careful interpretation- reading again and again, the data collected through interviews or observations during analysis, should be done to avoid missing out on crucial data, while identifying categories and patterns and coding. (Author & Diwaker, 2019; Morrow, 2005)
- The researcher must also study the cases that are different from the sample and compare or try to falsify his/her own theory. This method leads to keep a check on the validity of the research. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison et al. 2010).
- Creswell (2012) suggests an economic incentive as a form of motivation to respondents, to prevent them from dropping out due to financial or other kinds of pressures. He also advises the researcher to remember to thank them by either providing a certificate or a small gift or a token for taking out their valuable time for the study
- Maintaining a reflexive journal or diary about the personal reflections and experiences of the researcher at each stage of the research, helps checking for bias in the study. (Anney, 2014).
- Co-analysis is the process in which two researchers independently analyse the collected data and then compare the data. If there is consistency in the two sets of analyzed data, the data can be called considerably valid. (Anney, 2014).

What the Teacher Educators have to say:

To get an idea about how the Teacher Educators, teaching at the university level and supervising research thesis at the university level in Delhi, a semi structured interview with fifteen items was constructed by the researchers and was administered on 37 Teacher Educators. Purposive sampling was employed and data was analyzed and the results obtained are summed up as follows:

- About a majority (76%) of the Teacher Educators agreed that qualitative studies can be undertaken at the higher education level easily but with caution so that justice be done to the validity aspects. A few (9%) said qualitative studies should be undertaken only at the PhD level and not at the Masters level.

Majority of teachers (85.5%) said they believed that the researcher biases could not be

eliminated completely but with efforts of the researcher and certain methodologies they can be dealt with efficiently. A few teachers (3%) recommended the use of peer debriefing and triangulation as techniques that can be easily employed, however a majority agreed the time constraints and cultural and contextual differences such as language, compatibility issues, make it difficult to triangulate researches at the university level

- A few Teacher Educators (8%) pointed out the need to have a large sample for data collection whereas a majority said it was more important to gather rich data than more data. One Teacher Educator pointed out that data collection and analysis should continue with rigor till the researcher attains theoretical maturation. However, he also pointed that this is prone to bias of the researcher, but can be dealt with through co-analysis and other methods of triangulation.
- About 45% of the Teacher Educators believed, taking up qualitative study places a great deal of responsibility on the supervisors and only those supervisors with an experience and command over qualitative methodologies should be given such studies to supervise. Many Teacher Educators (67%) believed that segregation into qualitative and quantitative was unnecessary as both the research types require high validity standards and a researcher should be well acquainted with both kinds of methodologies.
- A majority of Teacher Educators (93.5%) were of the opinion that the importance of qualitative research is immense and it cannot be neglected or compared to quantitative research. A few (6.7%) however said qualitative research seems easy to many and will always have validity issues and can never have high validity.

Conclusion

Qualitative research should not be compared to quantitative research in terms of their objectives, methodologies and findings as they are two broadly differing areas and have their own purposes and merits. The differences have been pointed out in this paper signifying the importance of both and particularly pointing towards the scope and ability of qualitative research in exploring human, social, cultural and deep and sensitive topics requiring rich and descriptive accounts from respondents that cannot be quantified or expressed in numbers. However, researchers need to be careful while interpreting and analyzing qualitative data as it is largely subjective in nature and biases often alter the research findings. Therefore, several techniques have been discussed that can help making the qualitative research more valid and easy for researchers. On interviewing Teacher Educators about scope and challenges of

taking up qualitative studies at PhD level , there was mixed response on the importance , precautions and need of qualitative research which makes us believe that qualitative research can do wonders if issues of validity concerning them are taken seriously and addressed well.

Researcher's positionality and brief account of Researcher's reflexivity:

Having learnt the importance of including researchers reflexivity in a qualitative research, it became obvious to the researchers and also pertinent to include an account of our background or research experience that may have unintentionally influenced the formulation of the research paper. Thus we essentially mention that the researchers are people from the education fraternity and have deep interest and some experience with qualitative researches and have faced validity issues pertaining to their researches (that have mostly been qualitative in nature) and have kept dealing with their own biases and problems of subjectivity of the data obtained through participants through interviews or observations. However, their experience and affinity to work in the qualitative paradigm could have possibly influenced the patterns of the present research paper despite stringent efforts to be unbiased and objective.

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Online Teaching Experiences of Primary School Teachers in Private Schools of India

Avantika Mathur
Manpreet Kaur
Versha Negi

Abstract

COVID-19 has caused a chaos in the world order and has impacted almost every aspect of human existence. Educational institutions across the world have been affected, school closures all around the world, have affected 90% of the world's student population and led most countries to think about alternative ways of providing education to ensure that learning never stops. Keeping education continuity and stability in mind, most countries swiftly moved to online distance education by means of online platforms, e-learning, and ICTs, which triggered an unplanned and rapid shift in the education sector, unlocked the door to many prospects and opportunities, accentuated existing and new inequalities and gave rise to several challenges. As a result of such an abrupt shift from school closures, most teachers globally were compelled to deliver online learning without appropriate training, and support or time for preparation but being provided with diverse new tools; they had to digitize their course contents and/or develop new contents. From the initial phase of the crisis, the role of teachers has been critical to ensure learning continues through distance learning/ online education tools. In this paper an attempt has been made to investigate the lived experiences of teachers as they cope with daily challenges of online teaching. It also attempts to build an understanding of the history of online platforms and their viability in the Indian scenario. The paper will also highlight some of the best practices and online platforms preferred by teachers. The findings of paper are based on data collected from primary school teachers of private schools in India.

Keywords: Online Teaching, Teachers'Experiences, Primary Education, Private Schools, Covid-19

Introduction

Year 2020 has turned out to be the most unprecedented year in our living memory. The world has seen its biggest ever global disaster after World War II in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic. The disease's highly contagious nature has forced almost all the countries in the world to go into lockdowns of varying durations. Covid-19 has halted our movements, disrupted economies and locked us all in our homes. Just as many of us had begun to wonder whether the concepts such as 'complete digital connectivity', 'paperless offices', 'remote offices', 'online education' were only in the realm of science fiction or a distant future, the tide of time seems to have splashed us into a new world order – we find ourselves confronted with a much needed forward time-jump for which we seem to have actually been subconsciously preparing technologically as well as intellectually. Covid-19 has accelerated our need, and much more importantly our acceptance, to go digital. Our dependence on internet, and the

Avantika Mathur : (Research Scholars. University of Delhi)

Manpreet Kaur : (Research Scholars. University of Delhi)

Versha Negi : (Research Scholars. University of Delhi)

utility that we derive from it, has grown many folds. Along with 'work-from home', 'online teaching' has come to be acknowledged as the most significant radical change brought about in our lives by this phenomenon.

Covid-19 has impacted almost every aspect of human existence and has changed the world in myriad ways, and our schools are no exception. According to Global Monitoring Report 2020, more than 91 percent of the world's students are out of school, due to school closures in at least 188 countries (**GEM, UNESCO 2020**). In this hour of crisis, it was difficult to keep the education continuous and unaffected, in spite of this disastrous pandemic. Schools, teachers, governments and society have taken it up as a challenge and responded swiftly. To maintain the educational continuity, education systems responded with distance learning modes like, radio & television (TV) lessons and online learning platforms. This momentous shift in education from traditional classroom learning to distance learning is arguably the largest ever educational experiment at a global level – and that too a simultaneous one.

In India, schools are closed since early March and teachers and students have not met personally for several months. Like many other developing countries, India has used a mix of all three systems (radio, TV and online platforms) for educational continuity. Like many other things, teaching has also become completely online or at least 'distanced'. Online teaching over the internet is being used by private schools as the method to deliver the lessons. Since this shift was very abrupt, most teachers were compelled to deliver online learning without appropriate training, and support or time for preparation. Provided with diverse new tools, they had to digitize their course contents and/or develop new contents, innovate and improvise their teaching methods.

As the online teaching has become more prevalent in India due to COVID-19 pandemic, it becomes particularly important to know its growth and challenges, and to know whether it is actually helping the teachers and students achieve what they expect out of school. The challenges are much more profound in government and rural schools where teachers as well as students often lack the basic tools and resources required for online education. Percentage of households having computer facility is just 4.4 % in rural India whereas it is 23.4% in urban India, while percentage of households with internet facility is only 14.9 % in rural India as compared to 42.0% in urban India (**NSSO survey, 2017-18**). The same survey revealed that percentage of persons able to use internet is 13.0% for rural areas and 37.1 % in urban areas. It is undeniable that there are miles to go when it comes to online teaching, more importantly at school level. Availability/ speed of internet and appropriate hardware/ software are the major

challenges that teachers may face as India being a developing country, not everyone has access to high speed internet and the required devices. **“Accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning, and policy are some of the major arguments related to online pedagogy” (Dhawan, S. 2020).**

It is generally assumed that private schools fare much better in the sphere of online education, with teachers as well as students belonging to a more privileged section of society. However, even with this relative advantage, the private school teachers still face an uphill task. Teaching through online mode can be a challenging mission at any level of schooling as there is no physical contact, but it is even more challenging for primary teachers. Although today's young children are much more technology and internet friendly, yet children at this stage need constant monitoring and motivation to be attentive in an online classroom atmosphere imparted through devices which they have been habituated to use largely for entertainment. Thus, the present study is an exploratory attempt to understand teachers' perspective on online teaching and the challenges that they face. It also attempts to build an understanding of the history of online platforms and their viability in the Indian scenario. The paper also highlights some of the best practices and platforms preferred by teachers for online teaching.

Review of Related Literature

**"Literature is a comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation."
William Shakespeare**

An in-depth analysis has been executed in this study to understand the use and status of online teaching in India before the Corona pandemic hit our lives. During the last two decades, the revolution of online teaching had started impacting the higher education or the Secondary school sector in India the most. Teachers in the urban areas of our country were using tools and Websites such as Skype, Google and YouTube to begin with. Sharing notes, resource material in the form of videos or links of informative websites or online lectures were the major components of online teaching. Innumerable studies have been published in this regard and a few of them have been highlighted in the coming paragraphs.

Raja, J. A. (2012) in his research, '**Usage pattern adoption and influence of social networking sites SNS among college youth in Coimbatore and Namakkal districts'** analyzed "various literatures dealing with new media and social networking sites. The research attempted to find out the differences of usage of social networking sites by youth from different socio-economic backgrounds and the influence of socio-economic factors on social

networking sites usage. The major findings of his study were that usage of SNS by college students is more of a distraction from studies rather than aiding it. The researcher recommended efforts by school authorities and teachers in an effective usage of SNS in education."

Prasad, D. (2015) probed empirically in his research '**Impact of social network sites on perception of sociability and academic performance of college students in Bangalore city**' into the impact of SNS on the perception and performance of youth in pre-university education in an urban setting and deduced that it has contemporary, sociological and applied relevance. The manuscript provided empirical insights into institutional bonds and synergies, circuits and networks that bind the people, especially the youth of today and shape their identity as well as ideologies.

Kaur, M. (2018) in her research titled, "**Profiling the use of Social Networking Sites by teachers and students and exploring its effectiveness in teaching and learning**" presented data from Secondary school teachers and students from National Capital Region (NCR) of India related to their usage of Social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Orkut, etc. in education and found out that majority of teachers and students were using social media for their personal socializing and entertainment a lot but were still not confident and cognizant about exploiting it for scholastic activities. The teachers and students, who wanted to assertively use it, were bounded by administrative restrictions in their institutions. The parents were also not in favour of children using laptops or mobile phones for longer durations even for study purposes due to health constraints and negative influences.

Year 2020 has brought a revolutionary change in the mind sets of people. Due to the school closures, online teaching and learning transformed from a luxury to a necessity of every student of the country. Since the beginning of this year, researchers have been studying the pedagogic transactions happening in various parts of the world. It is a new virtual world where children as young as the ones at elementary level are being taught through online teaching. The challenges being faced in different aspects by teachers of toddlers, special educators, faculty who conduct laboratory classes and hands on exercises, physical education instructors are immense. To study all these arenas in the educational scenario revolving around this Global Pandemic, many research studies have been published this year world over.

Jena, P.K. (2020) Assistant Regional Director, IGNOU in his study titled '**Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 on Education in India**' highlighted the measures taken by Govt. of India to provide seamless education in the country. He elaborated both the positive and

negative impacts of COVID-19 and pointed out suggestions to carry out educational activities during the pandemic situation.

Saxena, K (2020) in her study titled **Coronavirus accelerates the pace of Digital Education in India** explained that academicians have shown agility, alertness and adaptability to revolutionize the teaching pedagogy and shift from the class room teaching to use of various online digital tools that can create an interactive and engaging learning environment. As universities and educational institutions were forced to close down, to curb the pandemic, instructors have shifted to remote teaching. Among various online platforms like Google Hangouts, Skype, Adobe Connect and few more, Zoom has emerged as a clear winner in India. Zoom has left behind WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram and has claimed the top spot on Google Play.

Dhawan, S. (2020) in her research article "**Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of Covid-19 Crisis**" includes the importance of online learning and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Challenges (SWOC) analysis of e-learning modes in the time of crisis. Her research also discusses about the growth of EdTech Start-ups during the time of pandemic and natural disasters and includes suggestions for academic institutions of how to deal with challenges associated with online learning.

Gudmundsdottir, G. B.; Hathoway, D. M. (2020) in their study, "**We Always Make It Work**": Teachers' Agency in the Time of Crisis" presented preliminary data from Norwegian and US teachers related to previous experiences with online teaching and elaborations on readiness. They examined data for evidence of pedagogical, ethical, attitudinal, and technical (PEAT) dimensions (Dicte, 2019) to determine how teachers' agency was activated in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings highlighted that despite teachers' inexperience and unpreparedness for online teaching, they were moderately prepared to use various digital tools and were willing to make online learning work for them and their students.

Trust, T.; Whalen, J. (2020) "**Should Teachers Be Trained in Emergency Remote Teaching? Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic**" To learn more about educators' experiences during this crisis, the researchers designed and distributed an online survey that received 325 responses from K-12 educators from Massachusetts, U.S. between April 4 and May 10, 2020. In this article, they have shared initial insights from the survey and provided recommendations on how to better prepare and support educators for teaching remotely in times of need.

Lowenthal, P.; Borup, J.; West, R.; Archambault, L. (2020) in their study "**Thinking beyond Zoom: Using Asynchronous Video to Maintain Connection and Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic**"- deliberated upon the COVID-19 pandemic enforced remote or online learning format that resulted in many faculty opting to transition their courses to live synchronous web meetings using web conferencing tools like Zoom. Despite benefits of synchronous communication, there were constraints with the use and overuse of synchronous live meetings (which many teacher educators ended up experiencing during the pandemic). In this paper, they described the experiences of how four different faculty, at four different universities, used asynchronous video to maintain connection and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers concluded with implications for practice and future research.

Szente, J. (2020) in her study "**Live Virtual Sessions with Toddlers and Preschoolers amid COVID-19: Implications for Early Childhood Teacher Education**", shared reflections on over 50 live Zoom instructional lessons with toddlers and preschoolers amid the first three weeks of school closures due to COVID-19 in the State of Florida. Reflections resulted in three themes:

- 1) implementing digital sessions with young children;
- 2) establishing and maintaining home-based child engagement through technology; and
- 3) ensuring family involvement/engagement through technology.

Implications and research recommendations were provided for early childhood teacher education programs and in-service professional development opportunities to ensure that teachers are better prepared for teaching and learning in an online environment.

The research work on the experiences of teachers during the COVID pandemic done all over the world is significant but in India which is still a developing economy and where technology is still trying to spread its wings with full force, a lot of research needs to be done. The greatest challenge lies in deliberating upon the difficulties being faced by the teachers, parents, and students at Primary level. Therefore, in this research an effort has been made to study the online teaching experiences of primary grade teachers in private schools across India.

Objectives of the study

- To understand the history of online platforms and their viability in the Indian scenario.

- To investigate the lived experiences of primary teachers teaching online.
- To identify the major (common) challenges that they face while teaching online.
- To explore some of the best practices and platforms preferred by teachers for online teaching.

Methodology

A descriptive study based on a **questionnaire** was conducted among the teachers teaching the primary classes in private schools. The sample was selected randomly. The questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms and a link was sent to the teachers via e-mail, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. A total of 30 responses were received. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions from basic information – such as which website/platform they use for online teaching to subjective questions like their experiences, challenges, and most innovative ways that they used for teaching.

Analysis

The questionnaire was sent to primary school teachers in private schools across India and the final analysis was based on the responses of 30 such teachers who are from the NCR region, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Navi Mumbai and Durgapur representing some of India's most reputed schools. Data suggests that 56 percent of the teachers were teaching grade 5 students with an **average class strength** of 40 students. The **amount of time** each teacher dedicated to online classes extended to a maximum of 3 to 4 hours daily. Also, the average preparation for each day was around 2 to 4 hours. Hence, during Covid-19 the **average working hours** for teachers ranged from 7 to 8 hours. In addition to this, private school teachers also spent many hours on online trainings in new technologies, software, and techniques. Most of the participants responded that their schools had organized workshops and online training activities daily in the initial phase to equip the teachers to deal with the challenges of online teaching.

Many **educational technologies** existed prior to Covid-19, but one had not explored it for school teaching let alone primary school teaching. All the participant teachers have followed a synchronous model of online learning. **Synchronous learning** is more structured learning strategy, where the courses are scheduled at specific times and in live virtual classroom settings. In this way, students benefit from real time interactions, hence get instant messaging and feedback when needed (Littlefield, 2018). From the responses of the sample teachers, it was evident that a variety of video conferencing applications, forums, and software have been in use. Some of the most popular ones being Google Meet, Google classroom, Zoom,

Microsoft Teams, Padlet, Exam.net, Peardeck, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Youtube, Byjus, Cisco Web Ex, Moodle, Mind mapping and quizzes. **Learning management systems** (LMS) such as Google Classroom have been extremely useful to set up online learning. An LMS stores unit and lessonplans and often has activities built into it such as discussion forums, quizzes and e-portfolios. It is undeniable that the **challenges of online teaching** can be of numerous types but we tried to categorize and sum them up in the following six broad categories : preparation of content, delivery of content, student engagement, prompting by parents, assessment and any other. Based on the responses received, it was seen that assessment is the most challenging aspect of teaching online. Majority (58%) of the teachers found it the most challenging to assess and evaluate the learning of the child. This was found to be due to various factors such as inability to view all the students at the same time, mostly one-way conversation by the teacher, presence/ participation of the students' parents, non-uniform access/ adaptability at the students' end; and most importantly the absence of the in-person atmosphere of the real world classroom.

Keeping the students engaged and prompting by parents while the teacher is teaching online are the next challenging aspects with as many as 49% of teachers finding them to be the most difficult feature of online teaching. Teachers shared that online teaching for primary school students also required a lot of efforts on the part of the students' parents. However, the effort often transcended into participation by the parent – sometimes actively in the form of prompting answers which is distracting for the teacher and this also made it difficult to assess the learning of the student.

Surprisingly, preparing the content (36 %) and delivering the content (24%) are reported to be comparatively less challenging aspects of online teaching by the respondents. Teachers who were initially intimidated by technology have now become proficient at planning for an online class. Story-telling, interactive PPTs, short videos are among the most popular innovative ways that teachers use to make online lessons interesting and engaging for students. Almost all the teachers said that they have learnt something new in terms of handling computers like, doing voice-over PPTs, presenting the screen, edit videos, playing online quizzes and many more.

Online classrooms have also brought up the new issues of classroom management and it is needed to learn methods of managing remote classes and students online. With regard to the below-average students, many teachers felt that they are not able to give them enough attention that they require. These students need personal interaction more than other students.

Teachers shared their experiences where these students did not turn their camera on or unmute themselves even after repeated prodding. With such cases, teachers miss personal touch the most, that is there in classroom teaching as compared to online teaching. This group of children is the one whose learning is most hampered by the shutdown of the schools.

Another interesting aspect that was pondered upon was the response of students towards *activity classes* such as music, dance, yoga and physical education wherein a teacher's physical presence makes a huge difference in learners' understanding and practice. 52% of the teachers opined that students were actively involved in such activities whereas 36% felt that there was moderate engagement by students. On the lower side, 12% of the educators felt that the students needed motivation to participate in these extra-curricular activities. Majority of the teachers found these activity classes as a breather from academics and maximum number of students were evidently enjoying these co-curricular sessions. These activities ensure a holistic growth of students in times when the movement of children is restricted to their houses only. In such times, health and physical education, dance, yoga, vocal and instrumental music, drama, drawing, painting, art and craft sessions channelize students' energies in a constructive manner. The need to do something creative and engaging mind in a peaceful and positive activity is fulfilled by participating in such sessions.

No two individuals are alike and a class teacher has to involve all the variegated personalities in the class even if the teaching mode is virtual. Engaging **introvert and below average students** as actively as others has been a tricky challenge for teachers. Many participants pointed out that introvert students mostly turned off the cameras making excuses of limited connectivity, and gave delayed responses. The below average students are slow in completing their work during live sessions and needed regular reminders. Another salient observation was the constant prompting by parents which hindered the students' own thinking and reasoning ability. To get the complete attention of students, teachers frequently asked questions, appreciated and applauded the efforts of students, encouraged them and even sent personal messages to commend their work. As pointed out by the respondents that involving a below average child in an online class of more than 30 students where all the students cannot be seen together on one screen, is quite exigent, so teachers also try to guide the parents on how to cope up with the class curriculum by providing practice techniques to be performed at home.

Overall experience of the participating teachers towards online teaching was quite tilted in favor of the regular classrooms. Almost all the teachers felt that online teaching was only the need of the hour and not the most preferred method especially for younger students. Although

most of them seemed to identify and acknowledge the benefits of online teaching, they missed the human touch and the personal connect with their students. Despite the fact that teachers engaged in a synchronous model of teaching, where they were meeting all of their students daily in a virtual classroom, they responded that in Primary education the human connect cannot be replaced and it was difficult for them to engage their students and connect emotionally. Some of them termed online education to be an “**impersonal medium**”.

Conclusion

During the Covid-19 times, teachers have rapidly evolved their teaching methods and honed new multi-media skills to impart online education. The experience of primary school teachers in Private schools of India has been both challenging and enriching. Teachers have had various opportunities to learn new skills, make innovative lesson plans, design activities which would ensure greater student engagement. To successfully achieve interactive teaching; learning materials and guidance, questions to be provided before class; teachers should be capable of guiding and organizing online interaction; students should actively communicate with teachers online; face-to-face discussion and communication should ensure a feedback mechanism for better learning. Some of the innovative techniques used by teachers included using YouTube videos and storytelling to engage the children. Teachers have started making interactive power point presentations with a variety of stimulus generating activities to enhance student participation. Teachers shared that an ideal power point presentation for primary grades included a video link to generate an initial interest in the lesson, proceed to the central theme of the lesson , then include online games or Q/A sessions to make the students active and responsive and finally a recapitulation in the form of a worksheet (which is already provided to all the students). Online puzzles, quizzes, e-books, animations, simulations and games have been a great asset to online teaching as well. Collaborative efforts from the teachers to build resources and share resources has become much easier and cost effective.

To sum up one can say that this system of online teaching is an interim solution and although all the stakeholders have adapted to it, they still miss the physical contact of regular classes. In the future, we can hope to adopt the best features of online education and move towards a more blended form of teaching, where regular classroom teaching is combined with computer-mediated activities with more flexibility in terms of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

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Art Education: Bridging the Gaps in Education

Sushmita Lakhyani

Abstract

“The article focuses on the need of developing human values in today's society. It examines the theories of philosophers, educationists and artists. It analyses the imbalance in our present education system where it lacks the development and training of 'feeling' and overemphasizes the training of 'intellect'. It draws the conclusion that art activities lead to education of senses where in the process of art manifests values, develops order and feelings which further help in nurturing humanity. Art education, through the process involved in art activities, trains the 'sensibilities' and 'feelings' which helps in using the 'acquired knowledge' in the right direction and taking the right decision. It not only bridges the gaps in education but establishes itself as a source of 'core humanistic value' to education.

Keywords: Art, Art-Education, Sense-Education, Humanistic-Values, Peace.

Introduction

In today's fast paced world, our society is experiencing the rising trend of violence in all spheres of life - be it at home or at the workplace or in a religious institution. The human beings have become so impersonal that they don't seem to see beyond their own selfish desires, motives and expectations. The prevalence of perpetual poverty and economic deprivation pushes the individuals on to the evil paths; the extreme of which is the most dreaded 'terrorism'. Negative tendencies such as depression, stress, frustration, seem to have a vice like grip over man/woman which has made him/her a social as well as emotional wreck. The need of the hour is to explore and appreciate the advantages of being sensitive to all and everything around, that is in the form of kindness, caring, selflessness and benevolence. Some sort of way out is required to nurture the above said values and be productive to society. The article focuses on whether art can play in bringing about positive change.

Education helps in the acquisition of knowledge, but the question arises, Is this acquired knowledge used in the right direction? It is observed that highly educated individuals play a key role in the terrorist outfits. Jitka Malecckova, referring to the 1999 report by the 'Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress for the US Central Intelligence Agency' on the social background of the terrorists, states that “the only professions that are over-represented among the terrorists are students and the unemployed. [1]”

Decision making involves the role of both 'feeling' and 'intellect'. Education overemphasizes the training of the intellect but lacks in the training of feelings and sensibilities. In art activities, most of the decisions are taken on the basis of feelings and intellect as well. Not all of the art

Dr. Susmita Lakhyani : Artist, Art Educator, Department of Education, University of Delhi.

work is planned before starting the painting, much of the decisions (related to different elements and principles of art) are taken at different stages as the work progresses on the basis of feelings. This results in developing and involving feelings in decision making, thereby training the feelings. Feelings are based on what one perceives. What one perceives depends on the signals received by the brain from the senses. Our reaction to the situations around us depends on our perception [2]. Gibson considered senses as perceptual systems [3]. Art here provides an opportunity to develop feelings and purify the senses. Senses, once purified, elevate the spirits which help in making the right decisions. Wickiser states: “The senses must be educated because it is on them that consciousness is based. Consciousness makes intellect, feeling and judgment possible”. [4]. The senses need to be honed and sensitized. Education in art, to a great extent, plays a major role in increasing the individual's perceptive abilities, thereby making a fundamental change in one's habits and attitudes.

An eminent Japanese poet, philosopher and an avid photographer, Ikeda, D. had placed before the UN, a proposal (soon after the September 11 terrorist attack on twin tower), in which he expressed his ideas and perspectives regarding global peace. He stressed upon the spirit of self mastery or self-control. In other words, the proposal focuses on the elimination of the urge to manipulate and exploit others for one's own benefit. This urge, he described as the root cause of all evil including terrorism. He says, it is however unrealistic to expect self restraint on the part of the terrorists, but least we can do is to have the courage and wisdom to address the underlying conditions of poverty, injustice and immoral values etc., that are the enabling factors of terrorism. Ikeda at this juncture stresses on inculcating moral values through art and culture [5]. His suggestion of defeating the inner evils present in all of us and promoting values through art, proved its validity in his exhibition of self shot photographs. A schoolboy, on viewing them remarked "I liked all the photographs taken by him but the best, in my opinion, was the one that had two rainbows. It was a very cool photograph and it surprised me because I have never seen two rainbows at the same time. It was a very peaceful photograph because the birds were flying happily against the backdrop. It was a visual feast as it made everyone feel very calm. I would also like to see the world as peaceful as Mr. Ikeda's photograph [6].” Art has the power to bring about peace inside and outside. The creator first aligns himself with the higher order, feels the inner unity and peace which further transmits in the perceiver. Ikeda addressed art and culture as the soft power which helps in promoting human values and nurturing humanity. It is this soft power which is needed in today's society [7]. Truly, art nurtures values. Promotion of art is promotion of values. Keiler viewed "art - a manifestation of values [8].” Here it refers to the values embedded in the work of art such as

truth, originality and honesty, mastery and perfection, beauty, dedication and individuality. It is these values which the society strives for. They are beyond the conventional 'material value' and 'functional utility' of the work of art.

Giving a new turn to the question of values, Mago P.N. writes "The sages of India insisted upon following such methods as '*paranayam*' or the controlled breath and "*Nadi Shudhi*", that is, purification of nervous system to keep the senses alert. They felt that working in any art medium was a way to mental and spiritual development [9]." Art activities, in fact help in developing values like empathy, honesty and so on which further makes an individual more humane which every religion aims for. In the text titled 'Natural Religion' the German philosopher Goethe, has been referred, saying, "who has science and art, he says, has religion [10]"

There exists a misconception that the main purpose of art is 'beauty' and 'entertainment'. This understanding stands as a hindrance to savor the true worth of art. Picasso, an influential artist of the 20th century and a co-founder of the Cubist Movement said, "The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls." [11]

Not only visual arts but music also has its role in purifying oneself for example, Sufi music is played not for pleasure but for cleansing the mirror of the heart. Art also has the capacity to align the heart and the mind. Once there is an order in the mind, it will naturally encompass harmony and balance inside and outside. This can be explained with the help of an example - if a person is frustrated, instead of venting out his/her negative emotion on his immediate environment, one declutters one's room, arranges the closets, straightens the piles of books, organizes the other objects. This process is related to art as Art can also be defined as arrangement of things or putting things into order. It is here that unconsciously one channelizes one's negative emotion into creating an outer order which in turn manifests into creating an inner order, thereby leaving the individual in the state of calmness and harmony within. The whole process results in change in the 'outside' and 'inside' at the same time. The emotion of frustration has been diverted to establish 'order and balance'. The resulting change is aesthetic in the tangible and intangible form.

The strength of orderly minds has to be increased to overpower the disorderly minds. With reference to this, Mago states, "Art has the capacity to give order to human feeling and is a great means of acquiring emotional integrity, it helps to intensify our intellectual grasp of reality. Art is the ordering activity of the human mind, which distills our most significant experience, it sifts and organizes relations in the order impressed on us by our senses [12]". He further refers

to '*Sukraniti saar* ', written by the ancient Indian sage Shukracharya, who emphasized that '*kala*' or art is a more comprehensive discipline than '*vidya*' or learning through reading and writing. He emphasized that it plays a more significant role to develop one's mind than 'education' [13]. In fact, art should not be considered as an additional insignificant subject, but instead should be taken as the backbone of education, on the whole. On the importance of art much is written in Sanskrit literature as well. In fact, in Sanskrit literature a human being is not considered to be complete till he has been educated in art and literature.

Italo-de-Francesco writes "Art as education is not a fringe subject, a dispensable area, but one which is integral with all education [14]." Likewise many other philosophers, be they modern or ancient, have given their consent to the importance and the worth of education in art, but the fact is, there will be no change in the society till we practically take steps in raising the status of art education, provide facilities and update its courses. The present situation reflects that art education does not have a worthy position in the school education system. NCF 2005 also emphasizes the significance of art education and the poor status it has in the schools [15]. Dr. Deepak Kannal writes "The pathetic state of art education at the school level is not recognized as an immediate concern by most of the educationists. The courses prescribed at this level are not only outdated but ridiculous, devoid of a faintest predilection towards imagination, creativity or sensitivity. Instead it is merely an imposition of mindless skill and labour. 'Cleanliness' is the supreme criteria for value judgment, the rest is worthless [16]." Apart from course upgradation there is also a need to make masses aware of the power and objectives of art. The notion that art is just for enjoyment or is just a hobby enjoyed by the elite class, has to be destroyed. Art has to be practically recognized as an integral part of education, to make it reach the masses, or else, it will just be known for its by-products and not for its true purpose.

Conclusion

The society today is ridden with countless negativities. It can be concluded that the indisciplined, uncontrolled egoist mind is the root cause of all barbaric acts. The mind can be either a war zone or a haven of peace, it is where the war or peace takes place first. Life is about the decision one takes, and decisions are taken based on feelings and intellect. Anything and everything related to life should be the subject matter of education. It is analyzed that Education has a very narrow concern; the focus remains limited to training of intellect. It neglects the sharpening of sensibilities and training of feelings. From the discussion so far, it can be concluded that art activities lead to education of senses, whereas the process of art activities, manifest values, develop order and feelings, which further help in nurturing

humanity. Art education trains the sensibilities and feelings which helps in using the acquired knowledge in the right direction and taking the right decision. Art education involves education of senses which not only bridges the gaps in education but establishes itself as a source of imbuing 'core humanistic values' to education. There is a need to make art education an integral part of education not only theoretically, but practically as well.

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The Educational Value of School Prayer/Morning Assembly

Ravinder Kumar Gambhir

Abstract

“School Prayer/Morning Assembly is the time when all members of the school are at one place, i.e. prayer ground. It is a meeting point for students of different classes. Prayer/Morning Assembly is equivalent to balanced breakfast to begin a new day with full energy. The school Prayer/Morning Assembly, if conducted properly, can teach many core values like self respect, self discipline, honesty, efficiency etc. which help them not only in student life but throughout their lives. It is the best time to say prayer for a peaceful and positive start of the day and moreover the best time to communicate important information's to all the members, needed for smooth running of the school.

Many activities, eg., prayer, National Anthem, yoga, reading news headlines etc. are to be done in the short duration of 30 minutes. To conduct morning assembly, in a disciplined manner, all the staff members must perform the duties assigned to them by the Head of School (HoS). This is a serious time for the students as well as staff. Various national and religious festivals are celebrated by extending the prayer time. The school Prayer/Morning Assembly plays a crucial role in all round development of the students, as it helps them to become responsible citizens. I think it is the duty of the school to enrich the personality of every student through both academic as well as non-academic activities.

To make the morning assembly fruitful and effective, the students and staff must be punctual. The author, as a school student, never missed Prayer/Morning Assembly and advises all school students to follow the same. Missing school Prayer /Morning Assembly means missing a lot.

Keywords: Assembly, Equivalent, Meeting point, Disciplined, Core values, Crucial role

Introduction

School is a heterogeneous mixture of students of different strata, different classes, different ages, different learning subjects, different hobbies, different likes and dislikes. The Morning Prayer Assembly is the time where all get an opportunity to come close to each other and communicate their day today experiences towards life. This surely helps to improve the personality of students. Therefore, Morning Prayer Assembly turns to be a learning time for all.

School is a temple of learning. Temple is a sacred place where we go for offering prayers to thank the Almighty, the creator of the whole universe, for what we have achieved so far in our life and for our future well being. Similarly, to start our fresh day in a school with a positive note, we offer prayers to the Almighty. The Morning Prayer Assembly imbibes the feeling of unity amongst all school members. It is also the time when we get the opportunity to enrich the students' educational programme. In routine, in a school, prayer time is the only time when all the students, teachers and HoS assemble to begin the day with a good and positive note in the school. The most important feature of the Morning Prayer Assembly is that any

Ravinder Kumar Gambhir : Deputy Director of Education, Directorate of Education, NCT Delhi - 110018

communication made during this time, reaches each and every member of the school. The author was asked this question during his interview for the designation of Principal in UPSC-- What is the best time in school where we can communicate with all the members of the school at one place? His answer was “ School Prayer/Morning Assembly”.

Time management is a very important factor for smooth and effective running of a school. It is of utmost importance for the HoS to complete the assigned school activities within the allotted slot of time. Generally, prayer time varies from twenty to thirty minutes every day. Many activities are to be conducted during Morning Prayer Assembly. That is why it is important to give an approximate time breakup for all activities to be conducted during Morning Prayer Assembly. Proper utilization of prayer time plays a crucial role in the all-round development of the children.

However, assembly time can be extended, on the occasions of some national, religious or local festivals, e.g. Independence Day, Ram Navami, Krishna Janmashtami, Gurupurav, Eid, Christmas etc. The students and even teachers can perform: solo or group songs, dancing, skits, and/or plays to show feelings of Nationalism and cultural solidarity.

The celebration of festivals brings enjoyment as well as inculcates values. Religious festivals make us honour all religions. National festivals bring a feeling of nationalism. An important requirement of the school Prayer/Morning Assembly is well- placed, high quality P A (Public Address) System. It is an electronic system consisting of mikes, amplifiers, loudspeakers, connecting electric wires etc. This amplifies the normal human sound to the required volume. All activities during Prayer Assembly need proper communication which is possible only with an effective PA system.

The Beginning of the Assembly First of all, when the students enter the school they go to their respective classrooms to put their bags on the allotted seats. It is essential to maintain discipline in the school all the times. The safety and security of the students must be the top priority. The HoS, along with teaching staff must observe the movements of students at different crucial points, including washroom entry /exit to avoid any untoward incident. It is possible only when staff members along with the HoS and especially Physical Education Teachers reach the school 15 to 20 minutes before the actual school timings, i.e. 07.00 to 7.30 AM in morning shift schools and 12.30 to 01.00 PM in the evening shift schools. Anchoring of Assembly is, in general, done by PET or trained senior students. These days CCTV cameras (Close Circuit Television Cameras), installed at important locations, play a crucial role in keeping watch on the staff and students for maintaining discipline in the school.

Following activities, with reasonable time breakup, generally performed in schools, are as follows:

1. Assembling of students in the prayer ground. (Two minutes)
It is the time taken by all staff members and students to reach the prayer ground. All teachers must be very alert and help students to move from their classrooms to prayer ground and stand in proper lines and in disciplined manner. The students stand as per their heights in ascending order in a way that the head of the student, in a line, is not visible to the third student. Head Boy / Girl and Class Monitors must also coordinate in conducting the Morning Prayer Assembly in a cordial manner. Such an environment is essential in the Assembly.
2. Prayer. (Five minutes)
Prayer is a set of specific words that connect a person with Almighty and show his faith in God. Prayer is secular and is sung in a spiritual tone. It brings discipline and humility. The students express their gratitude towards God for His blessings and spiritual guidance. Prayer can be said in text but in schools generally, it is sung together led by a choir group. It is more communicative and effective if some musical instruments like harmonium, tabla, flute or drums are played along with. Meaning of the school prayer in any of the existing regional languages is almost the same. Prayer also inculcates ethical values amongst the students.
3. National Anthem. (Two minutes)
Singing the National Anthem expresses great love for the country. Every word of our National Anthem creates tremendous love for our great nation, India. Same is for the students all over the world. The habit of singing the National Anthem inculcates feelings of Nationalism and Patriotism. To give due respect, we must maintain decorum by standing straight while singing the National Anthem. Using proper lyrics, our National Anthem takes 52 seconds to complete. The habit of giving full respect to the National Anthem begins from school.
4. Physical exercise and Yoga. (Four minutes)
Physical activity maintains and improves all body systems e.g. blood circulation, nervous system, muscular coordination etc. In other words, it improves our physical health. It is commonly said that a sound mind resides in a sound body. The students need to reach the school on time therefore they do not get time for exercise or yoga in the morning at home. Physical exercise and yoga for a few minutes is a must for students for physical development. Out of 30 minutes allotted for prayer, 5 to 7 minutes can be given to exercise which, though insufficient, but are very much required to inculcate the habit of doing exercise and Yoga.
5. Reading headlines from Hindi or English (or local language) Newspaper. (Two

minutes)

It is of great importance to develop interest amongst the students for reading newspapers to update the knowledge about what is happening in different fields e.g. social, political, scientific, sports etc. at national and international levels. The students also come to know about the latest developments and current affairs which help in various school competitions as well as career making competitions. Interested students can read newspapers available in the school library. During Morning Assembly, time being the main constraint, only headlines can be read.

6. Attendance of students . (Three minutes)

This is further divided into two parts: Taking attendance of students: A senior student calls the roll numbers from one to maximum number of students of a class. The attendance of all the students is marked by the class teachers in the class attendance register. It saves a lot of time in the class. -Marking attendance of all classes by class monitors on the school attendance board. This Board, being an important feature, reflects the total attendance of the school students at a glance.

7. Students from the prayer ground to classrooms. (Two minutes)

All the students go to their respective classrooms under supervision of their class teachers in a much disciplined way as per instructions.

8. Thought of the Day. (Optional)

School is the place where we must imbibe the positivity in the personality of growing students. 'Thought of the Day' is a saying of one or two lines in English or Hindi which is spoken by a student or teacher which has deep meaning. This takes only a few seconds. A thought is food for the mind of the students. It is meaningful only when understood and followed. Here are some examples of the 'Thought of the Day': "The greatest sin is to think that you are weak." Swami Vivekananda "Don't wait. The time will never be just right." Napoleon Hill

"Jealousy is just a lack of self confidence." Anonymous

Each class can have 'Thought of the Day' written on the class blackboard. For this purpose, duty can be given to a group of three to four students on a monthly basis. The thought can be a saying of a famous personality or it can be made up by the students themselves about some idea which they feel strongly about, and which is meaningful.

9. Pledge. (Optional)

It is also called a pledge of allegiance. Dictionary meaning of pledge is 'a formal promise or agreement to show our loyalty to our nation and/ or a cause'. Pledge is a

statement (may be one sentence to a few sentences) spoken by all school members, during prayer time to show their love and devotion for the great Nation India and National Flag and to pay our respect for our elders. Example of pledge, said in Kendriya Vidyalayas during Morning Prayer Assembly is: “India is my country and all Indians are my brothers and sisters. I love my country and I am proud of its rich and varied heritage. I shall always strive to be worthy of it. I shall give respect to my parents, teachers and elders and treat everyone with courtesy. To my country and my people, I pledge my devotion. In their well being and prosperity alone, lies my happiness.” Every school has its own pledge, based on their vision and mission of the school.

10. General announcements including important circulars or orders. (Optional)
All academic organisations including schools are administered by the Education Department governed by the State Govt. Hence, the schools have to follow the instructions issued by the Education Department in the form of various circulars or orders, from time to time. It is not possible to read out all the circulars or orders. Therefore, HoS or a senior teacher should inform about a few very important circulars or orders, which are important and relevant, to all present in the assembly—students, teachers and others-- for timely follow up. However, all circulars or orders are to be circulated to the staff through an official order book and get their signatures.
11. Short story reading or short play by students with moral message. (Optional)
Due to very limited time for the assembly, such activities are not performed daily. These activities are to be performed, based on the availability of time or on the occasions of some national or local festivals.
12. Message from the Head of School.(HOS) (Optional)
Head of the School can utilize the time, as and when available, to speak on any topic to convey important messages, e.g. character building, save the environment, hard work key to success, value of being disciplined, etc.

All the teachers must contribute to conduct the Morning Prayer Assembly smoothly. In nutshell, I can say that Prayer Assembly plays a very crucial role in the overall development of the students. Academics make the person knowledgeable; however the proper grooming of personality takes place during prayer time. The Head Boy/ Girl of the school should conduct the school Morning Assembly Prayer under the guidance of the Physical Education Teacher. Special Assemblies are to be conducted under the guidance of Teacher-in-Charge. It will certainly help develop self confidence amongst the students.

“To keep a lamp burning we must keep putting oil in it. We too need oil for our ceaseless work. What is oil? It is prayer. Prayer is the source and strength of our work”....St. Teresa.

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