

Samuhik सामूहिक पहल Pahal

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Challenges and Opportunities for Practice

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Imagining the Implementation of FLN Mission

Creating Viable Models of Practice on Ground

Atanu Sain and Namrata Ghosh

Miku (name changed) is a six-year-old. She's very excited today as she will be going to the 'baro school' (big school) where her brother goes, for the first time. Her school is on Ajodhya Pahar (Ayodhya Hills), a picturesque plateau region located in the Purulia district of West Bengal. She had spent the last three years in a little anganwadi centre close to her house and has learned so much already – shapes and colours, opposite words, rhyming words. She knows many stories, can read picture books and even recite so many rhymes. Her parents are always amused at the ease with which Miku can talk to everyone and explain her thoughts and ideas simply.

At her anganwadi, Miku loved playing with blocks and puzzles the most – creating new things with squares, triangles and rectangles and solving jigsaw puzzles. She loved her Anganwadi Didi and enjoyed learning new things from her – like animal names and sounds, animal movements, where animals live, learning new games and all the exciting art and craft work. The meals at the centre were delicious too and she had learned the names of many fruits, vegetables and spices. Miku is proud that she also knows how to count and can easily distribute a pack of sweets among her friends.

Miku had a lot of friends in her anganwadi and neighbourhood. She is looking forward to a very exciting time in Class 1 now. She goes to school holding her brother's hand and enters her classroom. She looks around for play things, toys and puzzles but cannot see anything. She spots a cupboard and thinks

the playthings must be kept inside to keep safe. The walls are bare too, with no charts or posters, no pictures to look at. She feels disappointed and confused. Her classmates are sitting quietly one behind the other. Not in a friendly circle as in her anganwadi! So, she cannot see anyone's face properly as she takes her seat – she can only see the backs and heads.

Now Miku starts feeling a bit nervous. She finally looks at the teacher's chair and finds her teacher sleeping on it. She is very surprised and wonders if taking naps was a part of class 1 routine. Miku waits patiently for 15 minutes. But soon, she grows impatient and goes up to the teacher. Tapping him on the wrist, she asks "Sir, if you sleep in class, who will teach us new things? How will I know what to do?"

It was now the teacher's turn to get surprised! After overcoming his initial embarrassment and unease, he talks to Miku. He wants to understand who this girl is, where she comes from and how she found the courage to approach the teacher and place her demand so easily.

He gradually found out about her anganwadi centre and her love for the play materials and books there, how her teacher taught her about so many interesting things, how she had a daily routine with play and activities and even hears about her kitchen garden. The anganwadi kendra being close by, the teacher decides to visit it one day and observe the processes there in order to understand it, even apply it in his own class.

This incident shows us how a simple question and conversation can evoke the process of transformation silently within the teacher. The incident is also reflective of the fact that children by nature are fearless, curious, eager to learn, keen to communicate and know that play and learning is serious business. They love to explore, discover and look forward to do things by themselves in order to learn.

While Miku moved smoothly from her loving home to her warm and happy pre-school experience, unfortunately, her transition from pre-school to early grade received a jolt. She got momentarily disconnected. While she's keen and eager to learn, her potential and expectations have to wait.

Luckily Miku applied her agency to demand her learning and her teacher was open enough to learn and change himself. At this juncture, both Miku and her teacher need help and are both willing to do what it takes.

This is where interventions need to be designed and implemented, because increasing figures of enrolment and attendance or schooling does not lead to a consequent increase in learning. Learning needs reflection, thinking, planning, application, assessment and a consistent repetition of this process in the form of a collaborative process of research.

NEP's Response to the Learning Needs of Very Young Learners

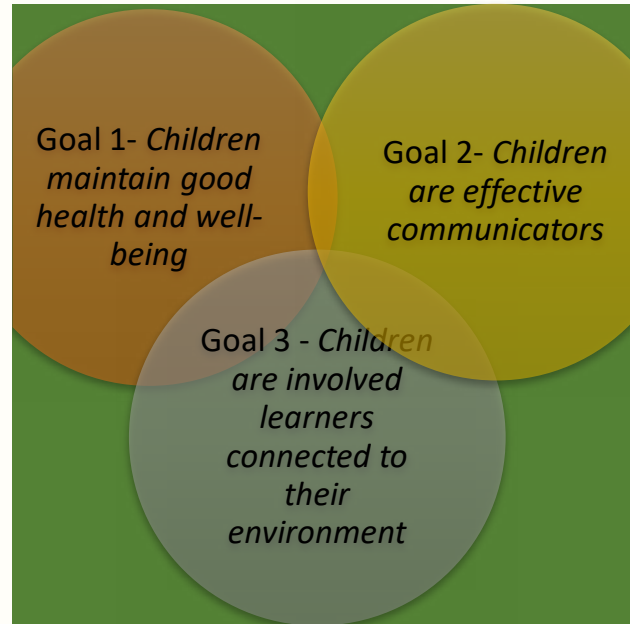
NEP 2020 responds to this need to improve learning in schools and calls for "a flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning, comprising of alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement. It also includes a focus on developing social

capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation" (NEP 2020, Page 7).

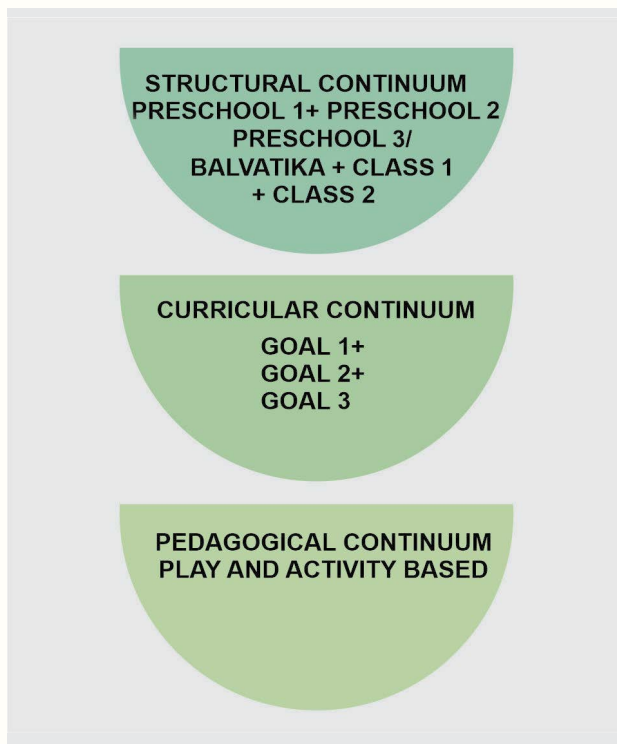
The National Education Policy 2020 is also reformatinal in nature in that it recommends structural, curricular and processual overhaul to envision a new 5+3+3+4 structure based on class and age.

The first five years of the structure, is what is called the foundational stage. This has three years of pre-primary education followed by two years of early primary grades. Together these years are being seen as a single unit imagined as a learning continuum.

This continuum is envisaged to comprise of curricular and pedagogical continuity, synergy and convergence across the key domains of development (namely - physical, social emotional, language, cognitive, creative aesthetic), that are subsumed under the three larger goals.



The five-year Foundational Stage with its structural changes can however be effectively implemented only when there are curricular and pedagogical reforms towards integration and planned continuity across 3+ to 8+ years as illustrated below.



From our case study, we can see why it is essential for Miku and her friends to continue to feel connected to their previous

experiences of pre-school, even after they enter the early grades. How important it is to have a curricular continuity – not just in terms of learning outcomes but also learning processes and materials. Had Miku found similar charts, posters, play and learning materials along with a motivated teacher, her learning continuity would not have received the jolt that it did. She would not have been disappointed or worried either. She would have simply continued her learning journey as effectively as before, eager to learn new things and master concepts and skills appropriate to her age and grade in areas of literacy and numeracy with ease and comfort in her foundational years.

Operationalizing NEP's FLN Mandate Through NIPUN

NEP 2020 has called out the criticality of the foundational stage leading to the launch of the National Initiative for Proficiency in

Table1: Summary of Key Interventions in the Foundational Stage

State	State Partner	Intervention Type
Bihar	SCERT, ICDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FLN models on ground in co-located spaces with anganwadis + classes 1 and 2 • State support in textbook development for FLN, Classes 1 and 2 (English and Numeracy)
Uttar Pradesh	SCERT, Basic Shiksha, ICDS Directorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE program with anganwadis both standalone and in co-located spaces • Support to State's FLN Mission called Mission Prerna for classes 1, 2 and 3 in early numeracy • Foundational stage models on ground in co-located spaces
Maharashtra	SCERT, ICDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE program with anganwadi centres, models on ground, home based learning programs • FLN program for school readiness component in Class 1 (Vidya Pravesh)
Rajasthan	SCERT, ICDS, DoSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE training at anganwadi centres • Support and training of class 1 mentor teachers in co-located spaces • School readiness component in Class 1 (Vidya Pravesh) • State level curricular resources and strategy notes
Assam	SCERT, DSW, ICDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Education in Anganwadi centres • PSE program in K-Shrenis (pre-primary sections in primary schools)
West Bengal	ICDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE program in anganwadi centres in curriculum, capacity building, creating model centres , parenting and state resource development



Vikramshila

Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN).

Here, foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) refers to the child's ability to read with meaning and solve basic maths problems by Class 3 (that is, by the end of the Foundational Stage). These are considered crucial skills for success in life. NEP accords the highest priority to achieving FLN.

NIPUN Bharat is envisaged as a national mission on FLN. It has been launched by Ministry of Education to ensure that every child has these skills by class 3, by 2026-27. Thus, it has been made time-bound in nature.

Those of us working in the education sector have been given an enormous opportunity to design and implement effective programs and interventions based on this policy framework to align schools with the vision of NEP 2020.

This will help to ensure that all children achieve the learning goals facilitated by effective classroom transactions and resources for improved learning outcomes. It is essential, thus, to develop long-term, holistic and comprehensive programs covering the foundational stage.

Vikramshila's Experiences in FLN: Key Challenges and Suggestions

Vikramshila has been working with state governments and development partners in the area of Foundational Stage through a number of programs. This section aims to give an overview of the work and partnership model. It also provides a summary of key challenges and suggestions to strategically work towards effective FLN programs.

Navigate Multiple Departments and Institutionalize Inter-departmental Convergence: In each of our efforts the challenge is of working with multiple departments. Pre-primary education comes under the department of women and child development. Primary education (the early years too) is under the department of school education. Together they constitute the foundational stage. NEP 2020 has highlighted the need for effective synergy and convergence between departments. However, ground level program implementation is often challenging due to bureaucratic rigidities and structural inflexibilities.

For years the two departments have been working in silos. Thus, any program envisaging

a continuum must first begin with dialogue and visioning. It is essential to recognize and acknowledge the strengths and experiences of each department to be able to work in collaborative unison. A strong sense of harmony needs to be the foreground. Joint consultations and workshops can be organized to achieve it.

Each department has its repository of knowledge, skills, experience with implementation, management, data collection and supervisory systems. It is best not to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. It should be a conscious choice to review existing resources and processes and build upon that for effective and time bound results. In order to work towards realizing the FLN Mission for the children in the foundational stage, a collaborative approach is needed with strong political and bureaucratic will geared towards the best interests of the child.

Develop a Strategic Roadmap Collaboratively and Build on the Existing Work: We have found it to be immensely useful to understand where things are at present, in order to plan ahead for FLN programs. This is especially relevant with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on institutions and individuals. Studies for scoping and situational analyses have helped us to source existing resources in terms of curricular frameworks, teacher resources, classroom inputs and children's resources that already exist with the two departments. It has also helped us to find out about enrolments, attendance, classroom processes, community school interface, ideas of co-location and perceptions of key stakeholders.

For example, we found that in some states 3–6-year-olds are in anganwadis and 6+ is the entry age for class 1. In many other states, 5+ is the entry age for class 1. In Assam and West Bengal, for example, 5+ children are found in anganwadis as well

as in pre-primary sections in government schools. In other states some 5+ children may be in anganwadis while others would be in class 1 where the age for entry is 5+. Some states have a large number of 5-year-olds out of school. Thus, large cohorts of children are missing out on pre-primary education and essential school readiness time and skills.

These learnings are important to build programs and design routines and resources. Some states have a large number of single teacher schools. Some states have classes 1 and 2 sitting together in most situations due to teacher shortage. Some others have a large vacancy of supervisory force.

It is important to develop a realistic state level strategy and roadmap based on findings from the scoping study where representatives of both departments along with SCERT, CSOs and others are included. Academics and practitioners both need to be a part of this group to develop a strategic roadmap for the short term, intermediate term and long term.

Design and Develop Comprehensive Frameworks for the Foundational Stage: In our state partnerships, we found that curricular designs, resources and learning packs are available in most states. Often, we found these to be well-designed and well-intentioned efforts; these include textbooks, teacher manuals, handbooks, reading programs, storybooks, and different classroom routines. When we mapped them across the 5-year foundational stage with the three learning goals, however, key gaps emerged. We found the lack of a holistic vision that prevented the immediate application of these resources to the school sites to respond to the call of the FLN Mission.

The existing resources, we found, were developed without a larger design framework and adequate evidences from the field. Hence, these were often piecemeal in

their approach without effective backward and forward linkages. This often led to growing curricular gaps, which could not be adequately addressed. These resources cannot be seamlessly woven to address the holistic vision of NEP 2020.

Further, in order to address the shift from domain based to goal based curriculum and pedagogy, integrated thinking and design are necessary to achieve FLN outcomes. What needs to be advocated strongly is a comprehensive curricular framework for 3–8-year-olds enriched from existing resources and learnings, aligned to the three learning goals and field realities in order to meet the desired FLN learning outcomes and timelines.

These learning outcomes have been given in much detail in the NIPUN Bharat guidelines, which can be further adapted and integrated with state level learning outcomes. Modular and flexible learning packs and resources including a routine, activity bank, weekly/monthly calendars and TLM kits need to be prepared that are in progression, age and developmentally appropriate. This can be used with children irrespective of whether they are located in school or pre-primary section or anganwadi kendra, in multigrade situations, in standalone or co-located spaces.

Handbooks and manuals on using the learning resource packs need to be prepared with details of TLM and activities. There should be a judicious mix of structure in the lesson designs as well as adequate space for autonomy and innovation for anganwadi educators and teachers. The resources are best kept simple, easy to understand and illustrative in nature, keeping the idea of progression visible.

Further the states' enthusiasm and investments in worksheets need to be tempered with an understanding on how children learn in the early years. While worksheets can be culmination activities

after introduction of concept with materials and pictures, they cannot be the primary pedagogical and assessment tools in the early years. This is a big area of advocacy in our work with different state governments.

Plan and Invest in Transformational Capacity building across the Foundational Stage Spectrum: Any education policy, no matter how progressive, is bound to fail if teachers are not capacitated as partners to be both empowered and motivated. The new FLN vision calls for a paradigm shift in approach, methods, visioning, understanding and implementation. Thus, capacity building of teachers from schools and anganwadis needs to be around perspective building, attitude shifts and skill building to enable them to cater to the idea behind the three learning goals, learning approaches and their associated learning outcomes through activity based and developmentally appropriate pedagogy (DAP). There should be sessions to account for backward and forward linkages across the learning continuum and flexibility to account for multigrade and multilevel teacher situations, as teacher rationalization is unlikely to be realized any time soon.

This requires visualization and implementation of a comprehensive, modular pedagogical continuum that is play and activity based, which can be followed across the entire foundational stage from pre-school to Class 2. Joint workshops with anganwadi teachers, schoolteachers and headteachers are an excellent way to demonstrate and build convergence on ground. This has been tried by us in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand with great success. The states should also be motivated to provide for dedicated FLN teachers and ensure their continuous capacity building through trainings, workshops and academic exchanges in Shishak Sankuls and other forums. Schoolteachers and anganwadi teachers can be mutual resource persons for each other, as each has their set of strengths that can benefit the other.



With respect to assessment, the NIPUN guidelines have explicitly defined the assessment procedure and provision to measure learning outcomes on a regular basis. This includes state-led large scale assessment and school-based assessment as well. In this context, capacity building of primary teachers in both language and numeracy would be crucial. A robust capacity building plan needs to be made in alignment with state offered training programs (e.g., NISTHA). Also, there should be provision for specific and need based in-person or online training to equip teachers to adopt the idea of creating a stimulating print-rich FLN classroom (both literacy and numeracy rich) in primary grades and anganwadis. Continuous dialogue and sharing of experiences within the teacher community and between anganwadis and schools would also help to create opportunities for cross learning, mutual respect and support.

Working with the Community as FLN Partners: Regular progress updates and meetings with community members and parents are crucial in ensuring that there is strong reinforcement of FLN mission and goals at home as well. In order to do this,

community-based Shiksha Melas, TLM Exhibitions, Reading Festivals etc. can be undertaken both in school premises as well as in community spaces. Regular PTMs need to be undertaken and institutionalized along with other school events encouraging community involvement and participation.

Our 'Khushi ka camps,' reading festivals, reading camps, parenting and home-based learning programs, together with community chaupal sessions have emerged as successful interventions that promote interlinkage of schools, anganwadis and communities. These events are holistic in nature, as issues of enrolment, transition from AWC to schools, school attendance and regularity, nutrition, safety and habits also get discussed.

Continuous Mentoring/Coaching Support: The new education policy recommends continuous mentoring support to teachers by the system's academic cadre. While BRC and CRC are the designated academic cadre at block and cluster levels, their role in enabling and supporting teacher networks and academic discourses has not been proven yet. In the context, strengthening the existing structure and equipping their

resource persons is needed, so that they can undertake the necessary supportive supervision, coaching and mentoring to realize the FLN Mission.

In order to do this, we are supporting state governments to develop protocols and tools for mentoring. We find that it is challenging for teachers to handle multi-grade and multi-level situations, especially due to teacher shortage, inadequate classrooms, and lack of required teaching learning resources. Effective time on task is also a key issue that emerges from the field. In these cases, strategic handholding support onsite and through meetings, with practical inputs, suggestions, guidelines and demonstrations can go a long way in helping teachers overcome their genuine problems. Tackling effective time on task is so much more doable when challenges are resolved in a collaborative manner with mentors and peers.

Concerted efforts around inclusion and gender transformative discourse and practices: NEP 2020 emphasizes an inclusive classroom environment. Inclusion in our programs encompasses not just special needs but also gender inequality, and socio-cultural and economic disadvantages. As such, our programs on FLN work towards ensuring access for all children, appreciating diversity in the classroom, acknowledging each child as an unique individual, ensuring equal opportunity for both boys and girls, ensuring participation of all children in the learning process, adopting a sensitive approach towards designing activities and using resources, and avoiding any kind of disparity or discrimination.

The idea of inclusion and gender transformative practices thus need to be kept in the overall FLN discourse, its program design as well as assessment. We incorporate it in all our content. This includes stories, poems, artwork, worksheets, charts etc. In our pedagogical methods, classroom environment, teacher trainings as well as supervision tools we strive towards inclusion and gender-related egalitarian transformation as well. We practice inclusion with respect to attendance, participation and engagement, of both girls and boys and children with social disadvantages and special needs. This focus is especially important because identity and ideas of differences as well as attitudes of collaboration and mutual respect develop and get ingrained strongly in the foundational years.

It is these early years that can make significant difference in the life of a child, her family and the society at large. Creating communities of practice is the first step in realizing the vision of the foundational stage.

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Early Childhood Education in the Context of NEP

Learnings from Sangareddy

M Sreenivasa Rao

NEP 2020 is a clear and strong endorsement of the public education system. It envisions high-quality, equitable and universal education—in and through the public education system. This is as applicable to higher education as to school education (age 3-22 years roughly). Public-spirited, not-for-profit, private institutions will certainly have a role in the Indian education system. However, the state must provide high-quality education. All efforts are expected to be aligned with this goal.

New NEP 2020 aspires to universal provisioning of quality early childhood development; care and education must be achieved not longer than by 2030. This would be taken up in a phased manner. The major responsibility of delivering quality ECE is envisaged through institutions such as schools and Anganwadis, which would have the mandate to take care of the overall care, learning, development and well-being of the child. These institutions will also provide similar support to families for children younger than three years of age—within their homes.

NEP 2020 says that the “highest priority of the education system will be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025.” Therefore, classrooms will need to be strengthened with required resources, print-rich environments, child-friendly workbooks, storybooks, etc. Relevant teacher resource material/handbooks etc. will have to be made available as well.

The overall aim of ECCE will be to attain optimum outcomes in the domains of physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional and ethical development, cultural/artistic development, development of communication, and early language, literacy and numeracy development. Hence, “ECCE ideally consists of flexible, multifaceted, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based education”.

Our work in Telangana (in Sangareddy district) focuses on transforming anganwadis into vibrant learning centers for the holistic development of 3- 6-years-old children. Teacher capacity development is at the heart of a quality early childhood program and early learning opportunities available to children. Our experience suggests that such a holistic ‘in-service capacity development model’ can effectively develop teachers’ competence to ensure quality early childhood education programs for children.

While keeping the Anganwadi teachers at the center, our efforts span across all levels of ICDS functionaries. Our emphasis is on supporting the implementation of quality ECE programs within the ICDS structure with its existing resources. We do this for all Anganwadi teachers in the district through a multi-pronged model. This has evolved over the years based on our experiences on the ground.

We engage teachers through multiple platforms such as project meetings, sector meetings, *melas*, seminars, specific



commons.wikimedia.org/Jaisuvyas

workshops and onsite support at Anganwadi centers. An experiential approach provides opportunities for hands-on experiences to teachers through activities that they can do with children for enabling the latter's development. Peer sharing and learning are facilitated on these platforms. Developmentally appropriate curriculum and teaching practices followed by teachers are the key elements that foster optimal development in children.

With this understanding, and using field experiences gained over the years, we have a clear understanding of factors that affect the quality of ECE programs. We have developed 'teaching practices' that a teacher can understand well and can perform on an everyday basis in the Anganwadis. These practices are developmentally appropriate, can be practiced by most teachers, and foster significant development in children. These cover the following areas: classroom environment; safe and secure environment; children's hygiene; developmentally appropriate opportunities for children;

assessment of the development; and relationships and partnerships with parents and functionaries.

The effect on the ground shows that we are on the right track. A significant focus of our capacity development work with Anganwadi teachers is now centered around the key teaching practices to have more effect on the ground.

Importance of the Curriculum

A key aspect to achieving the goal of effective ECCE is a curriculum that suits the children's socio-cultural context, surrounding nature, classroom environment, and teachers who can transform children's development. NCFECCE 2014, and NCERT's Pre-school Guidelines 2019 and curricular resources suggest a thematic approach for preprimary education. This is an integrated and developmentally age-appropriate approach. Some of the state WCDs took support from the Education Department (SCERT), individual experts of ECE and NGOs who are working in the field of ECE to finalize the curriculum.

However, many states are still following discrete activities with limited time. The state should work with the Department of Education along with other experts and NGOs to have a good preprimary curriculum as suggested by NEP 2020. A few states like MP and Chhattisgarh have initiated collaborative, context-sensitive, curriculum development processes in alignment with NEP guidelines. These states have also developed thematic handbooks for Anganwadi teachers and other curricular resources. These efforts will enable the state governments to achieve FLN goals, if consistent mentoring, monitoring and training support is provided to the teachers as well.

Curriculum development has a broad scope because it is not confined only to the school, the learner and teachers. It is also inherently enabling for the human resource development of society in general. In today's knowledge economy, the curriculum for young children has a vital role in preparing them for the future and improving the economy of a country. It can also provide answers and solutions to the world's pressing conditions and problems related to the environment such as climate change and sustainable development, and political and socioeconomic issues such as poverty.

Indian society is highly diversified in nature. Therefore, pre-primary curriculum must inevitably consider diversified cultural needs as an aspiration rather than a reality. We need to aspire for 'education for diversified cultures' rather than for 'diversified education.' To address the needs of a population with diversified socio-cultural contexts and needs, we need to respond to prevalent systemic and school-based issues while developing curricula.

In the current scenario, there is a great need for collaboration and synergy between MHRD and MWCD. The biggest challenge is true collaboration between the Education and Women and Child Welfare departments

in working together to prepare a good curriculum for children and teachers. This would require a strong commitment to attain consensus by both the departments.

Our learnings and experiences of working with Anganwadi teachers in a few states are as follows. The state is required to support in preparing curricula and handbooks for teachers. Teachers can implement curricular activities effectively with children's meaningful engagement. Teachers would require handholding to implement the curriculum in an effective manner. The curriculum has to have flexibility to add local materials, stories, songs, and activities including nature walks as a pedagogical tool, etc. There is a lack of sufficient materials to transact the curriculum. Funds need to

Systemic Issues and Challenges

Language and script: The curriculum is failing to address the linguistic needs of children coming from different language backgrounds. The curriculum is not able to address this diversity and the teachers are not prepared or trained to address this.

Lack of curricular resources and infrastructure: Addressing the diversified needs of the children, the curriculum should be complemented with adequate resources of teaching and learning materials.

Quality of teaching-learning processes: The effectiveness of the curriculum is relatively dependent on the quality of the teachers who are directly responsible for the curriculum's effective implementation. Anganwadi teachers are overburdened with work other than the services of Anganwadis.

Socio-economic diversities: Socio-economic diversity is one of the major concerns in addressing the different linguistic, social, regional and local education needs of communities.

be made available to make it possible for Anganwadis to make the learning aids locally.

Context of Anganwadi Teachers and Roles and Responsibilities

Anganwadi teachers are crucial to implementing a quality ECE program, as envisaged in NEP 2020. There are around 1.4 million 'Anganwadi teachers' currently working under WCD. The Anganwadi teacher is a community-based frontline honorary worker/teacher selected by the district level committee for implementing the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. The Anganwadi Center (AWC) is the basic unit of childcare and service delivery at the village level, and the Anganwadi teacher is the only service provider assisted by a helper.

Early childhood education is one of the six services provided in Anganwadis, for which the Anganwadi teacher needs to spend most of her time in a day. The other services mainly cover health, nutrition and community education.

Given the emphasis on health and nutrition issues and their criticality in children's well-being and growth, the ICDS scheme prioritizes health and nutrition activities, resulting in monitoring efforts also stressing these. As a result, the AWT can provide less time and attention to ECE activities.

In the context of the ICDS program, there is a thirty-day job course training for newly selected AWTs, where around four days are spent on ECE. During the in-service period, a seven-day refresher training is offered to share their experiences and update their knowledge in the areas of nutrition, health care, and Early Childhood Education. Here too, the overall time spent on ECE is insufficient. Hence, Anganwadi teachers are either unprepared or inadequately prepared as ECE teachers.

It is evident that, due to the absence of well-planned, quality capacity-building programs and supportive onsite mentoring, Anganwadi

teachers are not able to develop the necessary content and pedagogic knowledge, perspectives on ECE, and vision for holistic child development.

Their understanding of the purpose of ECE is limited to scribbling, identifying and reciting alphabets, reciting some songs and rhymes, repeating the same stories without conceptual understanding, and emphasizing developmental needs.

Hence, NEP 2020 suggests preparing an initial cadre of high-quality ECCE teachers in Anganwadis. The current Anganwadi workers/teachers will be trained through a systematic effort by the curricular/pedagogical framework developed by NCERT. Anganwadi workers/teachers with qualifications of 10+2 and above will be trained through a six-month

Challenges of Large-Scale Training Programs Rollout

Very structural and rigid process in decision making

Leadership-centric style instead of a common approach

Prioritizing the goals simply and planning to achieve them

A systematic needs assessment and timely evaluation to address the challenges and required changes

Building a strong cadre to address the teachers' capacity building needs regularly

Mechanism to address the professional needs of various groups who are in the system

Lack of effective mentoring and monitoring mechanisms

Insufficient resources including the budget for teachers' professional capacity building regularly and consistently

New methods of professional development of teachers and other functionaries



long certificate program in ECCE. Those with lesser educational qualifications would be trained through a one-year diploma program covering early literacy, numeracy and other relevant aspects of ECCE.

Pieces of training at scale conventionally have many challenges in terms of identifying needs, delivery mechanisms, consistency in delivering content, time and schedule, and evaluation of the training program. When it comes to cross-functional departments that are managed by different leaderships, there may be more challenges than in-house or within departmental programs.

In Conclusion

NEP 2020 has a few salient features to strengthen the foundational years of development. It looks at ECE as an upward

extension to primary education rather than downwards. Its approaches toward learning outcomes are articulated very precisely. The new curricular framework of early childhood education would help teachers to engage children effectively. There is a requirement for support from civil society organizations, experts, etc. to contribute and build the capacity of ECE teachers to achieve the goals of NEP 2020.

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Why the Early Years Are So Important

Sunayana Chatrapathy

“Early Childhood Care and Education is the greatest and most powerful equalizer” is a line that resonated with all of us at Makkala Jagriti when the draft National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) came out. Evidence from neuroscience shows that over 90% of a child’s brain development occurs before the age of six years. The brain has extraordinary capacity for learning during this phase. Early childhood care and education is a critical window for development, which sets the foundation for later successes in school, career and life.

Various global studies have also revealed long-term impacts of ECCE. There are strong correlations between quality preschool education and higher incomes and lower

rates of unemployment. Estimates reveal that the development of a strong ECCE program is among the very best investments that a country could make. ECCE promotes equity, giving the best chance for children to grow up into thoughtful, creative, empathetic, and productive human beings.

Disadvantaged children can benefit the most from high-quality early childhood education. Returns from interventions that take place during a child’s early years are more significant than those that occur later on. When everyone is given a strong start, it helps reduce the costs needed to address poor results later on.

This also sets children on a trajectory to stay in school and achieve their learning potential.



Makkala Jagriti

What Does the NEP-2020 Say about ECCE?

Key aspects laid out in NEP 2020 with respect to ECCE include the following:

Universal access to high-quality ECCE across the country in a phased manner

A five-year foundational stage including three years of early childhood education and the first two years of primary school (as per the 5+3+3+4 framework)

NCERT to develop a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE in two parts for 0-3 years and 3-8 years.

Focus on holistic development and not just the 3-‘R’s. This includes physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development,

cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy and numeracy.

Delivery through the existing system consisting of stand-alone Anganwadis, Anganwadis co-located with primary schools, pre-primary schools/sections with existing primary schools and stand-alone pre-schools

Training for Anganwadi teachers and other ECCE workforce through pre-service and in-service trainings mentored by Education Department’s cluster resource centers

Convergence of various departments including the Ministries of Education, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs

This is crucial, since inequalities that take root early on tend to grow throughout school and life, making it increasingly difficult and expensive to address disparities later.

ECCE and Education Policies

Historically, children below the age of six years have not received much attention in our education policies. While the last National Policy on Education (1986) mentions ECCE as an important factor, the focus and attention to the early years from an education perspective has been limited. The government also launched the National policy on ECCE in 2013. However, little has been done by the states so far to bring the focus on ECCE.

What has worked well is the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), one of the world’s largest government-led programs for provisioning ECCE. It was launched in 1975. ICDS is designed to provide a range of services for young children under six years of age. These include preschool non-formal education, supplementary nutrition, health-related awareness, immunization, health

check-ups and referral services. These services are delivered through a network of centres called Anganwadis.

Currently these centres number around 1.4 million. These Anganwadis are run by around 1.3 million Anganwadi workers and 1.2 million Anganwadi helpers. These frontline staff serve approximately 80 million children.

ICDS is managed by the Department of Women and Child Development. ICDS has done remarkable work in catering to the health, nutrition and immunization needs of children through the Anganwadi network. However, pre-school education and early stimulation needs have not been prioritized. This has left children less equipped for their school life and adulthood.

It is therefore now a welcome and significant change that NEP 2020 focuses on Early Childhood Care and Education - the beginning of a child’s educational journey to build a strong foundation. This has the potential to make a massive difference to young children below the age of six years across the country.



Makkala Jagriti's Experience in ECCE

Makkala Jagriti has been working with children from socio-economically disadvantaged communities for 19 years now. In our work with government schools and poor urban communities, we noticed that children who came to the school at the age of six years were just not school-ready. They lacked the necessary fine and gross motor skills, cognitive skills and socio-emotional skills. All these showed that the Anganwadi system was not able to offer the required stimulation for different domains of development.

This prompted us to work with Anganwadis in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Development. We have had three main focus areas for bringing about quality ECCE and school-readiness among children.

First, creating safe, vibrant and conducive environments in Anganwadis: This is an important first step to ensure that the centers are functional, safe and well-equipped, with the right age-appropriate materials and environment for pre-school learning.

Second, building the capacities of Anganwadi teachers and helpers through formal trainings, mentoring and handholdings: They are trained on the importance of their role, importance of early years and on every domain of development for early years.

Third, empowering parents and communities to be effectively involved in children's learning process and in the Anganwadis' functioning: It is not enough to focus on the Anganwadi system only. Parents and communities have a huge role to play, especially in the early years. Parents are trained to create conducive home environments, provide early stimulation at home and nurture children's development meaningfully and thoughtfully.

Makkala Jagriti has so far worked directly in more than 300 Anganwadis in urban and rural Bengaluru. We have seen transformation in the Anganwadis where the time spent by Anganwadi teachers on pre-school learning activities has increased from 30-40 minutes to 2.5-3.5 hours. Parents and community members are now more involved. Children's attendance in the Anganwadis has increased as well. Most importantly, children's outcomes across all domains of development have shown significant improvement.

What has worked for Makkala Jagriti is following an ecosystem approach, involving all the stakeholders right from the visioning of the program. Our non-threatening, collaborative approach ensures that stakeholders like parents and Anganwadi teachers not only provide the buy-in but also strongly believe in the purpose and take it forward. Using experiential learning methodologies for the training of teachers and parents ensures that the learning is more effective and sustains over time.

Two of the most significant aspects of Makkala Jagriti's approach aligned to NEP 2020's recommendations are the following. The first is that the Anganwadi teachers' training program is delivered through experiential learning methodologies. The second involves activity-based sessions equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to play their role as effective ECCE practitioners.



Makkala Jagriti

Prabha, an Anganwadi teacher from the Tharahunise Anganwadi, says, “I wasn’t aware that my role was this important. I feel proud and motivated that my activities with the children can make a huge impact on them for the years to come. I spend all the time I can on engaging children in activities catering to various domains of their development.”

During the Covid-19 pandemic, from June 2020 to March 2022, we also had the opportunity to run a virtual program for 66,000 Anganwadis across the state of Karnataka. Through this process, we disseminated short videos to parents to equip them with the skills and knowledge to engage their children meaningfully at home. These involved everyday activities they could perform with locally available resources.

Looking Ahead

NEP 2020’s priority on ECCE is a step in the right direction. There is much that needs to

be done. There is an urgent need to spread awareness on the importance of ECCE across the country.

Civil society, early education experts, NGOs need to come together to partner with the government to make ECCE for every child a reality. ECCE has to become a social movement involving all sections of the society enabling bright futures for all our young children.

Sunayana Chatrapathy is associated with Makkala Jagriti, a Bangalore based non-profit that works in Karnataka with Anganwadis, government schools, childcare institutions and directly with communities.

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Connect On:

Reflections on Inclusive Education in the Implementation of New Education Policy

Mallikarjunaiah

NEP 2020 states, “The aim must be for India to have an education system by 2040 that is second to none, with equitable access to the highest quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background”. The following aspects of the policy are the most relevant to inclusion of all children in education:

- Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, by sensitising teachers as well as parents to promote students’ holistic development in academic and non-academic spheres.
- Respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curricula, pedagogy, and policy, equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to benefit from the education system and to achieve the goal of learning for all.

The concept of skill development from 5th grade onwards, flexible curriculum, outcome-based learning, school support systems, special education zones, teacher training reforms, greater autonomy to universities are just a few measures which would benefit girls/women immensely. These would need to be implemented with scientific precision-based road maps supported with budgets and built-in monitoring mechanisms.

In order to translate this vision in action we need to address the following:

Lack of child-centred and relevant curriculum: The curriculum lacks flexibility and does not provide choice to these

children. The teaching-learning material is not appropriate for children with and without special needs.

Large class size: There are normally 30 to 40 students in a class, which makes giving individualized attention to learners very difficult. Teachers find it all the more difficult with children with special needs.

Teachers need to be empowered to enhance their skills, knowledge and qualifications. This would help them to fulfil their role adequately.

Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative scripts, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring also need to be enhanced.

Recognizing, identifying and fostering the unique capabilities of each student: New provisions are made in NEP, which will favor students with disabilities. However, there is still uncertainty about the large-scale work that requires to be done, especially in courses of higher studies.

Identification of children with disabilities is a major challenge for teachers. NEP 2020 refers to learning disabilities only in the context of training teachers to identify disabilities, ignoring other cognitive disabilities that are mentioned in RPWD Act, 2016, such as intellectual disabilities and autism.

There is a need to standardize Indian Sign Language as a valuable language system

for all students, not just for students with hearing impairments.

Educational challenges of children with disabilities stem from a rigid curriculum, inaccessible schools and classrooms, absence of modified assessments, and deficit perspectives that place limits on what disabled children can achieve. These challenges need to be addressed while implementing the NEP.

Respect for diversity and for the local context in curricular and pedagogic processes needs to be highlighted.

Equity and inclusion has to be the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to benefit

from the education system and to achieve the goal of learning for all.

Mallikarjunaiah works on inclusive education at Association for People with Disability (APD), with several years of experience at the Shradhanjali Integrated School (SIS), an inclusive school run by APD since 1973. He was also a member of the team that prepared the state-level position paper on education for children with disabilities in Karnataka in 2021-22.

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A Promising Future of Teacher Education

The Vision of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Gomathi Jatin

Today we are living in a world engulfed in challenges and issues in every sphere of life. To enable a sustainable safe space of peace and prosperity for people across the planet, the United Nations Member States in 2015, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, at the heart of which are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education is very essential for overall development of human personality. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for individuals to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and it is identified as a stand-alone goal - SGD Goal 4, i.e., 'Quality Education' (UN, 2015).

Rigorous monitoring and review of the teacher education sector is proposed in the policy by initiating mandatory accreditation of TEIs by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

National Education Policy 2020 envisages quality education that is relevant and applicable within the context of the dynamic and fast-changing nature of the education space in India and the world. This was an attempt to fulfil the unfinished agenda of the

previous education policies, since we have left behind quality education while largely trying to address the issues of access and equity in education (NEP, 2019, p. 26).

Fulfilling such a huge responsibility will not be possible without committed schoolteachers and faculty in higher education institutions who will be the pioneers of transformation of the education system (NEP, 2019, p. 31). To be a practitioner in the field of education and achieve SDG goals, one needs to be able to set clear goals, translate these goals into sound curriculum and pedagogy and create meaningful opportunities for learners. For this, teachers need to be adequately prepared. Thus, teacher education is very crucial in preparing teachers to shape the next generation that can contribute to the country's social, economic and political transformation (NEP, 2019, p. 27-28).

Addressing Deficits in the Teacher Education System

It is very unfortunate that the teacher education sector has been encountering multiple challenges including sub-standard teacher education institutions (TEIs), functioning in silos and lacking commitment to the need for rigour and quality in teacher preparation.

The duration of teacher education programs range from nine months to two years and very few institutions offer the four year integrated Bachelor's Degree in Education. However, if we carefully look back into the past, a similar

model of four year integrated programs was undertaken in the four regional training colleges (now called as RIEs) to bring about improvements in teacher training, both in-service and pre-service.

These programs were envisioned with a purpose of offering high quality teacher training and were under the governance of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Since then there have been many committees that have reviewed these programs. Many structural changes have taken place in the RIEs as well, based on the recommendations provided by these committees.

NEP 2020 foresees the positive impact of technology use and integration. It has made provisions to support and adopt interventions by creating an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF).

Though NCERT is committed to the cause of school education in the country, there have been major setbacks in achieving the main purpose of quality. Moreover, with the implementation of National Policy on Education 1986 and the emergence of National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) as a Statutory Body in 1993, NCERT's functioning also underwent changes. Many pre-service courses such as the four-year B. A. B.Ed. and two-year M.Sc. Ed. Courses got discontinued (Parida, B. K., 2016).

Teacher education curriculum is largely theoretical and disconnected from school education. This is due to lack of practical and innovative curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The teaching methods and

pedagogy in TEIs are misaligned with school teaching and pedagogy. This creates a big gap between what is taught in TEIs and what needs to be practiced in schools.

There is a huge failure on the part of existing teacher education programs in preparing competent and effective teachers, thus impeding the quality of education. Dearth of good faculty in TEIs leads to poor supervision and mentoring of teacher trainees. Over and above, weak partnerships with schools do not provide schoolteachers the agency in preparation of teacher trainees.

Content knowledge is another big concern when it comes to preparing teacher trainees for subject specific pedagogies. TEI faculty are largely not equipped with subject specific content and pedagogy, thus failing to prepare teacher trainees for the same. This necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to teacher education.

Technology integration into the content is another area where TEI faculties lack the necessary competencies and skills. The current pandemic scenario has catalysed the deterioration of the teacher education system, especially due to the extensive use of technology, which majorly lacked meaningful purpose within these processes.

The pandemic resulted in a transition to online teaching, which proved detrimental to the quality of education. Neither schoolteachers nor teacher educators were equipped with technological skills and competencies to navigate through online teaching processes. The preparation of teacher trainees in this crucial period underwent boundless challenges in aspects of content, pedagogy, digital literacy and technology integration into content.

Research is very critical to the development of quality education. Yet, the research and innovation investment in India is currently only 0.69% of GDP. This compares poorly with 2.8% in the United States of America,

4.3% in Israel and 4.2% in South Korea (NEP, 2020, p. 45). TEI faculty are largely withdrawn from research practices in the field of teacher education in particular and education in general. There is a lack of networking and collaboration among the TEI faculties and with experts in the field of education. This leads to professional and intellectual isolation from the wider spectrum of education.

In addition to all these issues, the rate of increase in the number of teacher education institutions is alarming. There has been a substantial entry of the private sector that now has about 92% of the TEIs. A few of these have been shut down due to regulatory non-compliance. However, new TEIs in the private sector are also springing up. However, the growth in the government institutions or government-aided private institutions is rather negligible.

Despite the large number of TEIs, the quality of teachers produced is quite unsatisfactory. The claim of Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) in the 2016 report that “the teacher education space in India is dominated by private players, offering courses of doubtful quality” still remains unchanged (Tilak, J.B. et al. 2021).

Furthermore, there are very few institutions offering M.Ed. with intake in very low numbers. All universities do not necessarily have departments of education and the number of candidates produced by the university departments and government post-graduate colleges along with private institutions is grossly insufficient to meet the requirements of teacher education.

NCTE, the main regulatory body in teacher education, has not been able to check the proliferation of low quality teacher education institutions, or to ensure the quality of teacher education programs. Weak governance of NCTE has led to the downfall of the whole education system.

The Indian context is widely diverse, characterized by differences along the axes of culture, language, religions, caste, gender, etc. This adds to the challenges of the teacher education system. Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes curb their sense of responsibility and their ability to be sensitive and responsive to society’s demands.

NEP 2020: Way Forward

NEP 2020 has proposed radical changes by bringing in place systemic reforms to restore the integrity and credibility of the teacher education system. This policy marks the importance of the teacher education sector at par with high-level services such as medicine and law, where people’s lives are at stake (NEP, 2019, p. 283).

The vision of NEP 2020 is to bring in reforms in the existing teacher education structure and practices by moving it into the university system.

The vision of NEP 2020 is to bring in reforms in the existing teacher education structure and practices by moving it into the university system. This move envisages to situate teacher education in a multidisciplinary space wherein teachers can acquire a blend of high quality content, pedagogy and research. Such a space will enable teacher trainees in pre-service teacher training to interact with peers from other disciplines, making them professionally competent as teachers.

The policy introduces a complete restructuring of the teacher education system by proposing a four year integrated B.Ed. program of pre-service teacher education for different levels of schooling. This is proposed to be offered at the university level as a dual-degree i.e. in education with any desired

specialized subject (NEP, 2019, p. 287). This is very much similar to the RIE model of four year integrated programs, which are very few in number in the country. There was a recommendation by NCTE in 2014 to introduce four-year integrated B.A. B.Ed. and B.Sc. B.Ed. courses throughout the country to enable these to gain wide recognition.

With the purpose of strengthening teacher education in the country, NEP 2020 has proposed the restructuring of TE system on the same lines as the Regional Institute of Education. It also provides multiple entry-exit options and flexibility in program structure. NCERT and RIEs have been given the responsibility of planning innovative programs to prepare more effective teacher educators and short-term, discipline-specific programs to prepare more effective teachers for various levels (Parida, B. K., 2016).

There is a huge failure on the part of existing teacher education programs in preparing competent and effective teachers, thus impeding the quality of education.

The restructuring of the existing teacher education system aims to break the isolation of TEIs as stand-alone institutions. It envisages them becoming multidisciplinary higher educational institutions by 2030. This will enable the provisioning of holistic and complete education for teacher trainees.

They will then be able to impart such holistic and complete education to school children, ensuring high quality education as envisaged in SDG 4. The pedagogical aspects of the proposed four-year programs includes diversity training to enable teacher trainees to become sensitive and responsive to the larger diversity of our Indian context (NEP, 2019, p.136).

The NEP reforms in teacher education curriculum have the potential to cater to a multilevel discussion-based and constructivist learning along with the development of 21st century skills and abilities in teacher trainees amongst many other components. University-school partnership will be another key feature of this revitalization. Potential teachers will be able to hone the desired skills and obtain practical teaching experiences in the schools affiliated to the B.Ed. institutions (NEP, 2019, p. 133).

A very interesting and unique feature of this revamp will be the mentoring teachers from the school where trainee teachers will intern. This will give a very special and important status to schoolteachers. Along with teacher educators from TEIs, this will enable schoolteachers to share the agency in guiding and preparing teacher trainees (NEP, 2019, p. 136).

NEP 2020 also addresses the shortage of teachers by proposing the recruitment of adequate specialized instructors for specialized subjects. They are supposed to teach in a school or a school complex. They will be trained through programs offered by the school complex itself. This will strengthen community partnerships to support school education (NEP, 2019, p. 135).

NEP 2020 foresees the positive impact of technology use and integration. It has made provisions to support and adopt interventions by creating an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF). This new body has the mandate to facilitate decision making on the induction, deployment and use of technology (NEP, 2019, p. 343). The policy recommends various initiatives for leveraging technology for teaching-learning at all levels from school to higher education (NEP, 2020, p. 59). These initiatives are opportunities for the teacher education sector to strengthen the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework in the teacher

education curriculum. These also promise to prepare teacher trainees for the successful integration of technology in teaching (Schmidt et al., 2009).

The policy also creates a new niche for research and development as a culture in universities and colleges. It envisions teacher preparation to take place in centres of research and field action, offering a dynamic and stimulating culture of research and innovation. The policy promotes research based teaching and specializations to ensure the development of knowledge and practices relevant to the contexts of school and higher education. It places strong value in the faculty profile in departments of education to be diverse in teaching and research to strengthen multidisciplinary education of teachers and provide rigour in conceptual development.

Restructuring of Ph.D. programs by including exposure to pedagogical practices, designing curriculum, credible evaluation systems, communication teaching, in addition to research, is another important feature of this policy (NEP, 2019, p. 290-292). To bring in a synergistic transformation towards the growth of quality research, NEP 2020 aims to establish a National Research Foundation (NRF) to enable a culture of research in departments of education and higher education (NEP, 2020, p. 46).

Rigorous monitoring and review of the teacher education sector is proposed in the policy by initiating mandatory accreditation of TEIs by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Constitution of apex bodies like the Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA) and National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHRA) to regulate the teacher education system, is also seen as a positive step towards revamping the teacher education system (NEP, 2019, p. 294).

The effectiveness of any policy will depend on whether it is implemented appropriately,

how is it implemented, to what extent is it implemented and is the implementation resulting in desired outcomes. This will need multiple actions to be taken by various bodies in a systematic manner. These bodies include MHRD, CABE, Union and State Governments, education-related Ministries, State Departments of Education, Boards, NTA, the regulatory bodies of school and higher education, NCERT, SCERTs, schools, and HEIs.

Along with following up with timelines and plans for review, these bodies need to ensure that the policy is implemented in its spirit and intent, through coherence in planning and synergy across all these bodies involved in education (NEP, 2020, p. 62). Higher education institutions including TEIs must be strongly invested in initiating potential opportunities offered by the NEP 2020 to achieve its vision and a larger goal (Goal 4: Quality Education) of the SDG 2030 agenda.

Personal Experiences at Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE)

Working with Promises offered by NEP 2020 and CETE's Vision: CETE is an independent Centre at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. This Centre, established in 2015 as Centre for Education, Innovation and Action Research, CEIAR, has been engaging with, and promoting innovation in school curriculum, teacher education and higher education curriculum and pedagogy. CETE works towards revitalizing the education sector through research, academic programs, teaching, field action, policy advocacy, partnerships and collaborations.

CETE envisages its role as a 'Catalyst for Transformation in Teacher Education' through multiple activities. It offers long term and short-term pre-service and in-service programs in education, to teachers across India and beyond. True to approaching the NEP 2020 vision, CETE has a multidisciplinary team involved in research, teaching and field action, in education.

Creating Quality Learning Experiences through Pre-service Pedagogical Practice: CETE offers a three-year Integrated B.Ed. M.Ed. program (Innovative) in addition to other Master's programs and short-term programs in the discipline of education. Aligned with NEP 2020's vision, the teacher preparation curriculum at CETE encompasses the rigour of discussion-based and constructivist learning components including key areas like foundational literacy/numeracy, inclusive pedagogy and evaluation, and the development of 21st century skills such as problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, ethical and moral reasoning, and communication and discussion abilities amongst others. The diversity of faculty profiles in CETE caters to the multidisciplinary nature of the program.

Internship component of the teacher preparation program is designed to view theory and practice as a single continuing process. Strong partnerships with interning schools are perceived as the pillar of the program. Teachers of these schools are assigned the role of mentors to teacher trainees who are also guided by their respective pedagogy faculties at CETE. Mentoring is one of the most significant process in the preparation of teachers.

Collaborative learning processes are very prominent in the academic functioning of CETE. Peer learning, buddy system, and other collaborative learning techniques are the primary elements of the teaching-learning processes. There are also a number of Communities of Practice (CoPs) functioning across many of the programs offered at CETE. Faculty and students engage actively in the CoPs on various aspects related to education.

Research and technology are other important ingredients of teaching learning at CETE. Students gain opportunities to work collaboratively with faculty on various research projects. Use of technology and its integration is another notably visible area

for which CETE has been acknowledged repeatedly.

The teacher preparation program at CETE focusses on creating quality learning experiences for teacher trainees. It provides opportunities for rich pedagogical practice and builds students' capacities in every aspect of life.

CETE Achievements on This Pathway: CTET'S Connected Learning Initiative has won international recognition through the UNESCO King Hamad Prize in the use of ICTs in Education (2018, March). This initiative also won the OER Collaboration Award for Excellence 2019. Its international collaborative research in various areas of professional development, policy and financing in education provide a rich network of scholars and scholarship relevant to the global south.

Note: This article is a review of the prevailing challenges in the teacher education (TE) sector and National Education Policy 2020's recommendations to bring about improvement in the TE space. It is solely the author's reflections and opinions and is an attempt to apprise and caution the stakeholders of TE to delve with the policy and bring about possible changes for improving the quality of teacher education.

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Enabling Multilingual Education in Schools

Hemangi Joshi and Rajashri Tikhe

This article reviews the approach of Multilingual Education (MLE) recommended in NEP 2020 and provides some insights for its practical implementation in classrooms. The authors work on MLE in Maharashtra. The examples and the insights provided in the article are rooted in the experience of their ground level work.

It is often the case that children from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds first encounter groups outside their own community and are exposed to the national/regional language through formal education. Therefore, education is among the most crucial sites for language planning. Schools represent the primary associated institution through which legitimization for state's dominant language(s) is sought.

Language policy has long been viewed as a powerful instrument for the promotion of an imagined, and sometimes of a desired, sense of identity. It will be apt to review National Education Policy from this point of view.

In India, until recently, policy planners and implementers in departments of education have chosen either a null approach (ignoring the need for framing policies to ensure access to linguistic minorities) or a promotion approach (explicitly promoting a favoured language or languages). At the ground level, these practically result in restricting children in speaking their mother tongue/home language even during informal interactions in school premises.

With this backdrop, it is worth appreciating that NEP 2020 has strongly recommended multilingual education with acknowledgment of the importance of home language or

mother tongue in the process of learning at the elementary level. Promotion of bilingual approach and the use of bilingual material by teachers in classrooms are welcome steps.

Very importantly, NEP 2020 has clarified that the language need not to be a language of instruction to master it. It recommends high quality teaching of all languages to be taught to children. Guidelines about the standardization of Indian Sign Language also indicates that the policy not only takes cognizance, but also intends to take concrete steps on the issues of children with special needs.

However, with due acknowledgement of NEP 2020's strengths with reference to language teaching, it is necessary to discuss the scope for improvement in the approach. This would help us materialize the vision of multilingual approach truly. A hotchpotch approach could be sensed in the section on multilingualism in the policy. While acknowledging the diversity of languages on one hand, it recommends to invest in a large number of teachers only in the languages mentioned in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, consequently leading to hundreds of home languages or mother tongues being ignored.

It is critically essential that National Education Policy takes a firm and clear stand regarding its final objective of multilingual policy and accordingly its approach towards multilingualism. Does the policy aim at inclusion? That entails seeing multilingual and multicultural education as an end in itself, for which differences between languages, cultures and religions are seen as highly relevant. Alternatively, does it aim to be

exclusionist, in which differences are denied and assimilation is the primary goal?

The expressions of chauvinism in initiatives like 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' endorse the observation that the ultimate objective of policymakers is accommodation or assimilation of language minority groups into dominant/preferred language of those in power. Policymakers seem to be strictly emphasizing the commonalities in phonetics, scripts and grammatical structures in 'India's Most of the Major Languages' and claiming their origin in Sanskrit language.

It is worth noting that the policy omits the mention of acknowledging and appreciating the differences and uniqueness of many more Indian languages. It would have been apt for the policy makers to consider the fact that Indian languages are categorized into four main language families; namely, Indo-Aryan Languages, Dravidian Languages (which are in fact older than those of the Indo-Aryan family), Austric Languages (Austro-Asiatic sub-family) and Sino-Tibetan Languages. Except for some Indo-Aryan languages, those from other three groups hardly have common phonetics, scripts or grammatical structures. They do not originate or source their vocabulary from Sanskrit as well.

Policy makers are mainly referring to north Indian languages, specifically those from the Indo-Aryan family, while discussing multilingualism. They seem to be making further claims of Indian languages being the richest, most scientific, most beautiful, and most expressive in the world, with a huge body of ancient and modern literature.

This again creates doubts about the clarity of policymakers regarding the understanding of the core values of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The approach of celebrating diversity has an inbuilt sense of respect for other languages and cultures. It would have been principally correct to mention Indian languages as different in their richness,

beauty and expressiveness, rather than claiming them higher in quality than other languages in the world.

Lastly, absence of a firm stand on the ultimate objective and approach of multilingual policy is reflected in the recommendation of bilingual books with English as a second language. The option of home language/mother tongue and regional language for bilingual books should have been considered, especially for children learning in vernacular medium schools. In order to achieve multilingual education in practice, we would like to suggest the following proven strategies and policy changes.

Multilingualism and the Medium of Instruction at Primary Grades

In fact, any Indian school is naturally multilingual or at least bilingual. The language in the surroundings of a child is usually a regional language, which many a times is different from her home language. Teachers come to the school with some other language(s), often their own and the state's official language(s).

However, classroom processes becomes inorganic and un-educational, when the system pressurizes the use of only one language as the medium of instruction and education. From our practice, we want to argue here that it is very much possible that the medium of instruction and education at the primary grades comprises of 2 to 3 languages. E.g., we, at Unnati ISEC use Korku (children's home language), Hindi (language of surrounding) and Marathi (State's official language) for the purpose of education and developing literacy skills.

Since Korku doesn't have its own script, we use Devnagari script for Korku which is common for Marathi and Hindi. The choice of using a script for a non-scripted language has to be made thoughtfully, which requires policy

attention. In mega cities with considerable rates of migration even from other states, the option of a common communication language could be considered. Even literacy skills could be taught using different languages.

There is a strong need to revisit the present rigid mindset of the government and of the people. This poses a major challenge in breaking the pattern of single language instruction and making education accessible to diverse communities in a true sense.

Revisit the Policy of the Language of the Textbooks

Presently Government of Maharashtra has developed bilingual textbooks in Marathi and English. Non-cognizance of the home language or mother tongue is apparently seen on the part of the government. We are afraid that such a move, will add a burden on the teachers, children and the whole educational process. Here, the option of home language/ mother tongue along with the regional language for bilingual books should have been considered. This would have been more aligned with sound educational principles.

Governments of Chhattisgarh and Odisha, and NGOs like Patang India and Unnati ISEC are some examples in the country, which have done this and seen good results educationally. A. Jakhade mentions in 'Bharatiya Bhashanche Loksarvekshan' (Padmagandha Prakashan, 2013) that 56 language-communities reside in Maharashtra. We need to revisit the policy of the language of the textbooks in states like Maharashtra, which have large numbers of linguistic minorities, to facilitate educational inclusion in a true sense.

Teachers Learning Children's Languages: Government's Responsibility

Teachers are the key factor in achieving multilingual practice in classrooms. Even NEP 2020 has stated that it is non-negotiable that the teachers know children's languages. It is

advisable to recruit teachers from the local communities sharing similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, it may not always be possible at times for the reason of non-availability of such teachers.

In this case, it becomes imperative for the government that it arranges for crash courses for teaching mother tongue/home language of the concerned students for these teachers. Such language training courses may include orientation to local cultures as well, to facilitate the inclusion of the context of the child's life holistically.

In Maharashtra, Tribal Research and Training Institute, Pune, has created a course book on teaching Gondi, Bhilori and Pawari languages. Unnati ISEC, an NGO, has created a course of teaching Korku language to teachers and the public.

Governments Need Inputs on Implementing MLE

NEP 2020 expects the use of home language/ mother tongue not restricted only as a language of instruction. It expects its teaching as an independent language as well. While the Maharashtra state government recognizes the importance of MLE in school education, there is a big confusion over its implementation at the school level. These aspects include classroom teaching and learning, language of the text material and the evaluation strategy. We are sure that such confusion exists in many other states as well.

Government of Maharashtra encourages the use of children's languages in the classroom. However, it does not provide clear guidelines on how and to what extent children's languages are to be used and what pedagogy should be adopted.

The evaluation system concentrates only on the acquisition of literacy skills in the state's official languages and that too within a stipulated time period. It is practically difficult to achieve this in areas where



children's own language is different from the state's official language(s).

This fact is ignored, and the sole responsibility of identifying the ways of using children's languages and achieving the results, at the same time, is passed on to the teachers.

In fact, only a few teachers believe in the multilingual approach and work proactively towards it by creating supporting material. However, not only their efforts and approach goes unattended and unrecorded, they are also discouraged at times by the system. They are often expected to perform according to the state's expectations of children's achievement.

The state government has no clear position and guiding document over MLE in schools. Similarly, development of support material for teachers, such as glossaries in home language or mother tongues, repositories of bilingual stories, songs and a variety of books in different genres, and audio material is equally important to make teachers familiar with the accent of the home language and mother tongue of students.

Need for Multilingualism Policy in School Education at the State Level

NEP 2020 is a guiding policy document for the country. However, the arguments made above for making MLE a reality and the challenges mentioned, indicate towards the need for formulation of state level policies on MLE. States will have to consider the diverse and differential cultural, political and educational ethos of their regions and would need to come up with implementable policies and plans of action for MLE.

Hemangi Joshi works in Maharashtra for finding the strategies and perspective for including the MLE approach in school education. This is done by working intensively on pedagogy of language literacy and on education at the primary grades through a few learning centres. This work is carried out by Unnati ISEC, a Maharashtra-based NGO with which she is associated.

Rajashri Tikhe is working as a freelance consultant in the field of education. She has 20+ years of experience of working in this field with special focus on education of tribal children. She has developed insights into the MLE approach through her practical field experiences and through formal training in Multilingual and Multicultural Education (a certificate course) as well.

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Education Practitioners' Thoughts from Across India on NEP 2020

Samuhik Pahal Team

“The positive aspects of NEP 2020 include the recognition of ECCE as a crucial step during the foundational years and acknowledging the significance of FLN at the primary level of schooling. But the proposed implementation is not inclusive, as it does not provide any practical solutions to the issues of out-of-school and dropout children due to migration. Non-cooperation at the local school level, emphasis on documents for school enrolment, and language differences will continue as major obstacles in bringing all children into mainstream education. We think that there is still a long way to go in putting in place policies, addressing the demands and rights of the underprivileged, particularly migrants. Otherwise, they will be left out of this mission.” – **Ankita Yadav, Doorstep School**

“NEP 2020 (Section 6) recognizes large disparities in learning introduced due to the presence of multiple disadvantaged groups in India and highlights the need for specific strategies for each group. It also highlights the need to conduct research to ascertain measures to address their unique challenges. Play-based learning is also highlighted by the NEP (Section 2). The large gap in the foundational numeracy skills of students with visual impairments prompted systematic research and design of a play based pedagogy of inclusive and accessible computational thinking at Vision Empower. Joyful learning and positive outcomes of this research support the policy suggestions on the need for research-led interventions and a play-based focus on inclusive education.” – **Supriya Dey, Vision Empower**

“Acknowledging that over 3.22 crore children still remain out of school, the National Education Policy 2020 aims to achieve 100% enrolment by 2030 through a slew of measures such as setting up alternative and innovative education centres to ensure that children of migrant labourers are brought back into mainstream education.

It is necessary to have one such learning centre at every school campus with teachers trained to assess learning levels and teach mixed age groups on a fast-track mode. The school should make efforts to mainstream them through both academic and non-academic activities such as art, sports, social-emotional learning and vocational training. Participating in these activities along with the local school children is beneficial.” – **Karthik B J, Gubbachi**

“I find validation in one of NEP’s core principles that a vibrant education system requires “facilitation of true philanthropic private and community participation” because interventions for systemic change should also be about building empowered grassroots community institutions that are aligned to NEP’s focus on contextual education. This is how communities can have a stake in educational processes in collaboration with government systems - like two equally fundamental but different parts of the whole where the differences are the vital glues of unity-in-diversity that bind together the profound whole, create practical systems of accountability that are needed in public systems.” – **Arjun Trivedi, Karunar Kheti Trust**

“The tone and intention of the new pedagogical and curricular structure in the NEP is a hugely welcome shift. To consider children in the age group of 3-6 years capable of conscious multifaceted learning and by prescribing a pedagogical approach that is progressive and based on research is a huge need of the hour. We see in our work, everyday, how much of a happy and productive space our activity based kindergarten classrooms are. Visible impact in this crucial first stage of school, I feel, will add conviction and belief in the stakeholders associated with a child’s learning to embrace the shifts across higher grades.” - **Gowtham, Kanavu**

“New Education Policy 2020 boosts our work on mother tongue based multilingual education by giving a lot of stress on it, though earlier educational policies and commissions, and constitutional provisions including Right to Education Act, NCF 2005, etc. have also emphasised this.

The principle of education through mother tongue for ensuring quality education is an established one, and has been accepted worldwide. NEP 2020 recognizes it and

envisages at least the first eight years of schooling through mother tongue based multilingual education. However, education in the child’s mother tongue is being differently interpreted. Home/local/regional languages are often seen as the same. This leads to the dominance of the state language. The second challenge in front of us is the dichotomy of approaches in multilingual education.

A major source of apprehension is the mushrooming growth of private English medium schools at the door step of most parents, even in remote villages. Many states like Andhra Pradesh have started teaching English from Class I. In contrast, Odisha has pioneered in formulating mother-tongue based multilingual education policy in 2014 for tribal communities. Nonetheless, state-run English medium model schools and programs like Anwesha infringe on this policy.

However, the foundational stage, which includes preschool education, is a great opportunity for children’s development, as NEP 2020 emphasizes language education through play way method to move ahead, with focus on enjoying their childhood.” - **Malaya Padhan, Patang**





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