

## **National Education Policy 2020 of India: A Pathway Towards Culturally Rooted Global Ecosystem**

***Política Nacional de Educação 2020 da Índia: Uma via para um ecossistema global culturalmente enraizado***

***Política Nacional de Educación 2020 de la India: Un camino hacia un ecossistema global culturalmente arraigado***

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**Abstract:** This article provides an elaborate understanding about the educational landscape of India. The purpose of the paper is multifold. It presents a nuanced understanding of the National Education Policy NEP 2020 of India while critically examining its need, relevance, and significance in the contemporary scenario. The paper uses the research technique of content analysis. It is based on the methodical review of all the policy papers directly or indirectly linked with the NEP 2020. The author has employed her field experiences to substantiate the arguments built in the paper. It is developed in three parts. Part one explains the key features of the Policy. Part two discusses the planning and organization of school education as envisaged in the NEP 2020. Part Three examines the critique of the policy followed up by a final concluding remark.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy; India; School Education

**Resumo:** Este artigo fornece uma compreensão elaborada sobre o cenário educacional da Índia. O objetivo do artigo é múltiplo. Ele apresenta uma compreensão diferenciada da Política Nacional de Educação NEP, 2020) da Índia, ao mesmo tempo em que examina criticamente sua necessidade, relevância e importância no cenário contemporâneo. O artigo usa a técnica de pesquisa de análise de conteúdo. Ele se baseia na revisão metódica de todos os documentos de política direta ou indiretamente ligados à NEP 2020. A autora empregou suas experiências de campo para fundamentar os argumentos apresentados no artigo. Ele é desenvolvido em três partes. A primeira parte explica as principais características da Política. A segunda parte discute o planejamento e a organização da educação escolar conforme previsto no NEP 2020. A

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terceira parte examina a crítica da política, seguida de um comentário final conclusivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Política Nacional de Educação; Índia; Educação Escolar

**Resumen:** Este artículo ofrece una visión detallada del panorama educativo de la India. El propósito del artículo es múltiple. Presenta una comprensión matizada de la Política Nacional de Educación NEP, 2020 de la India al tiempo que examina críticamente su necesidad, relevancia y significado en el escenario contemporáneo. El documento utiliza la técnica de investigación del análisis de contenido. Se basa en la revisión metódica de todos los documentos políticos relacionados directa o indirectamente con la NEP 2020. La autora ha empleado sus experiencias sobre el terreno para fundamentar los argumentos expuestos en el documento. Se desarrolla en tres partes. La primera parte explica las características fundamentales de la Política. En la segunda parte se analiza la planificación y organización de la educación escolar prevista en la NPE 2020. La tercera parte examina la crítica de la política, seguida de un comentario final de conclusión.

**Palabras clave:** Política Nacional de Educación; India; Educación escolar.

## Introduction

Education repositions the relationship of an individual with self, others and the world at large. It prerequisites that while conceptualizing the process of education the people are placed at the core. Here, people refer to the individuals as also the communities in which they stay and the neighborhoods. This approach to thinking about the process of education is based on mapping the diversity across socio-personal realities of the people. The fundamental challenge here, is to ensure that the idea of education as an equalizer is not confused with creating homogeneity across these multiple realities uprooting people from their cultural contexts. The simultaneous challenge is to establish a systemic process which dismisses the practices of comparing these multiple social realities and cultural contexts, and asserting few as above many others. Education thus, needs to be embedded in the cultural context which capacitates the individuals to embark on a journey of acquiring competencies to be a global citizen while taking pride in their own identities.

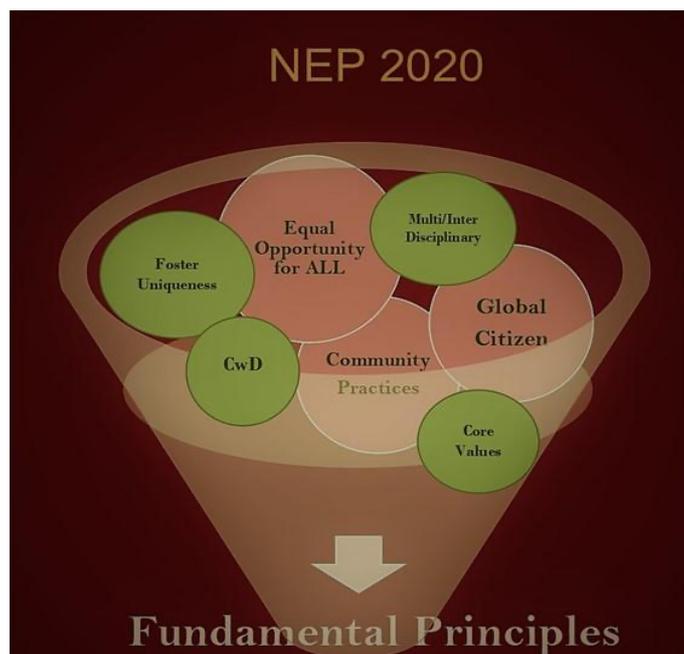
Education has always been an act of collectives which creates systemic provisions and procedures for the individuals. Communities in earlier times and government in contemporary times has the responsibility of planning and organizing education for people. It is grounded in the mapping of existing needs of the society and a foresight providing need assessment for the future. There are two possibilities herein. One the government thinks that the individuals are for nation and so the vision for the governance for the nation is the primary guideline for designing education in that context. Two, both nation and individuals are critical for the unabridged growth and development of the country and hence, education should be envisioned as a process wherein individuals and system share a symbiotic relationship. Both, system and individual, in this case, nurture

and strengthen each other. The education policy thus, exemplifies the relation of the State with its citizens.

In a country like India, which is full of diversity, it is of critical significance that the process of education is rooted in the cultural context of the individual while it also inculcates the professional skills essential to be a global citizen. The post-colonial India has had three major policies of education, Kothari Commission (1964-66), New Policy of Education - NPE 1986 and National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020). These also define the different eras of education in the last almost seven decades in India. Both Kothari commission and NPE 1986 have contributed to the ever-expanding horizon of education in India. Coinciding with the era of liberalization NPE 1986 laid the foundation for computer revolution in India. The school education was introduced with programmes like Computer Assisted Learning (CAL). The impact of introducing computer in education at the school level can be observed in tertiary education in India and subsequently at the international level where well-trained computer professionals from India continue to contribute enormously till date. This also explains that the methodical outcomes of a policy can be observed only if, at least, one full cycle of educational processes is completed accomplishing the core of its vision.

The India adopted its National Education Policy (hereafter NEP 2020) on July 29, 2020. The process began in January 2015. The policy was developed after a detailed consultative process with multiple stakeholders. It included over 2 lakh suggestions from various sources. Grounded in the enriched cultural context, the policy is built around the core value of nurturing the life of every citizen of India. Planned with a futuristic vision the policy has many firsts.

**Figure 1 - NEP 2020: Key Fundamental Principles**



\*CwD – Children with Disability

Source: Prepared by the author based on NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020, envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, sustainably, into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, providing high-quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. It is founded on the five guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability and will prepare the youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future.

The purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution (NEP 2020, p. 4-5).

As the first education policy of 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has convincingly proposed revamping of all the aspects of education including structure, governance and regulations. The typical features of the policy demonstrate a significant departure from the way the education was conceptualized in India prior to this.

## 1. Significant Features of the National Education Policy 2020

The fundamental principles that guide the policy have an undeterred focus on embracing and celebrating diversity; creating quality learning experiences for every student; inculcating constitutional values; and developing a robust work environment for teachers across all levels.

### *Creating Inclusive Learning Ecology*

The policy document in its opening paragraph explains the intention which is reiterated across the document. Inclusion is described in terms in diversity across multiple contexts and provisions to minimize the disadvantage incurred due to the context. There is a pertinent focus on Socially & Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and its intersectionality with gender diversity and disability.

While overall enrolments in schools decline steadily from Grade 1 to Grade 12, this decline in enrolments is significantly more pronounced for many of these SEDGs, with even greater declines for female students within each of these SEDGs and often even steeper in higher education (NEP 2020, Point 6.2).

The proactive measures include creating multiple pathways for the education of underrepresented population of India along with provisions for scholarships and other amenities to ensure accessibility, retention and progression of every student across various stages of Education.

In addition, the Government of India will constitute a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students (NEP 2020, Point 6.8).

The education of individuals with disability is accorded high priority from early age till tertiary education. The policy advocates for curricular and pedagogical provisions with specific focus on assessment of special needs and teacher training for ensuring inclusion of children with disability.

This Policy is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school

education. Barrier free access for all children with disabilities will be enabled as per the RPWD Act. Different categories of children with disabilities have differing needs. Schools and school complexes will work and be supported for providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support 26 National Education Policy 2020 mechanisms tailored to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classroom (NEP 2020, Point 6.10 -6,11).

### *Redefining the Purpose of Education*

In 1835 British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay drafted the education policy for India. That policy document ridiculed the Indian cultural practices while demeaning the prevalent knowledge systems. The primary motive for providing education in that period was to create Indian work force to smoothly run British administration. This system of education established a linear relationship between education and employment. This continued in post-colonial period as well. The NEP 2020, re-envisioned the purpose of education as two fold. One-acquiring professional competence and two-development of self. The policy has promoting rootedness as one of the fundamental principles. It refers to taking pride in one's own culture and identity while acquiring the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for becoming a global citizen.

The vision of the Policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen (NEP 2020, p 6).

### *Revamping Academic Structures*

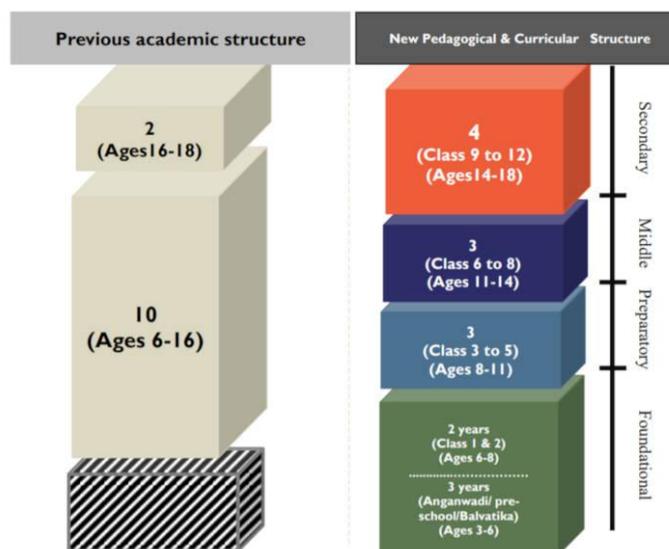
The policy is dedicated to providing quality education to every citizen of India. This necessitates revamp of the academic structures. Both, the school structure and the tertiary education structure are revamped.

The school now formally starts from the age of three 3 years. There are four stages of school educations. The policy describes the curriculum, pedagogy and teacher preparation for all the four stages in detail.

The curricular and pedagogical structure of school education will be reconfigured to make it responsive and relevant to the developmental

needs and interests of learners at different stages of their development, corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years, respectively. (NEP 2020, Point 4.1)

**Figure 2- NEP 2020: New Pedagogical and Curricular Structure**



Source: NEP 2020, p. 6

The tertiary education is also re-conceptualized. Now, the undergraduate programmes are four years of duration with provision for *multiple entry and exit*. There is provision of certification at each exit point. The students can opt for additional credit courses and deposit these in their *Academic Bank of Credits*. The possibility of completing undergraduate degree with research for high ability students is also created in the system. These students with demonstrated potential in conducting research, will be eligible to join the doctoral programmes without taking the Master's degree. As the policy envisions the role of education for overall development of the students, the undergraduate courses have a mandatory requirement of completing *Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC)* and *Value Added Courses (VAC)*. These innovative aspects added to the undergraduate programmes hold the promise to create a vibrant learning environment in the higher education institutions.

#### *Continuity across Various Stages of Education*

The policy demonstratively conceptualize education as a lifelong process.

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. (NEP 2020, p. 3)

**Figure 3 - Four Segments of National Curriculum Frameworks**



Source: Prepared by the author based on NEP 2020

The policy presents education as a continuum from Early Childhood Education to Tertiary Education to Adult Education. It has proposed establishing multiple pathways to ensure the learning process as allowable within the context of an individual. The curriculum designs developed on the basis of NEP 2020 are dedicated to building strong subject base from early stages to higher stages. The content is cauterized to avoid any repetition across different stages. With a pertinent focus on acquiring the stage specific learning outcomes, the competency enhancement continues to be the main goal.

#### *Multilingualism and Medium of instruction*

The policy situates education in a community context. It acknowledges the home-school gap as one of the major reasons for dropouts mainly at preparatory stage. This gap widens due to difference in the home language and the school’s medium of instruction. The language diversity is one of the significant feature of communities in India. To ensure that language does not become a barrier, the policy has proposed home/native language as medium of instruction especially till preparatory stage.

Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language (NEP 2020, Point 4.11).

The policy promotes recognizing, accepting and respecting the language diversity within the country. The Ministry of Education, India has asked all the statutory and

regulatory bodies, responsible for any stage of education, to make available study materials, digitally, in all the Indian languages included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.

In addition to Sanskrit, other classical languages and literatures of India, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Pali, Persian, and Prakrit, will also be widely available in schools as options for students, possibly as online modules, through experiential and innovative approaches, to ensure that these languages and literature stay alive and vibrant. Similar efforts will be made for all Indian languages having rich oral and written literatures, cultural traditions, and knowledge. (NEP 2020, Point 4.18)

The policy envisions effective communication as one of the basic skills. The language is also described as a preserver of cultural and indigenous knowledge. It is also discussed as a tool in becoming global citizen. The policy thus, promotes possibility of learning foreign languages also. The inclusion of Indian Sign language in this gamut of languages is a significant contribution of the policy.

### *Multidisciplinary Approach to Learning*

With evolving knowledge systems, the disciplinary approach to learning has limited scope. The emerging specializations are mostly multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary. It is important the students learn to assimilate beyond the rigid discipline-based boundaries. The policy has proposed a flexible system for choice of subjects by the student. This has been proposed at school as well as in the higher education. The possibility of selecting major and minor subjects from two different disciplines exists as an inherent part of the system. At school level such a provision also challenges the notion of hierarchy among school subjects. The policy envisions an institutional structure wherein all the subject across discipline are valued as equal. The policy places this idea as one of the fundamental principles

[...] no hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams, etc. in order to eliminate harmful hierarchies among, and silos between different areas of learning (NEP 2020, p. 5)

A university will mean a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate and graduate programmes, with high quality teaching, research, and community engagement. (NEP 2020, Point 10.3)

A holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings -intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. (NEP 2020, Point 11.3).

The policy envisions the teacher education programme in a comprehensive multidisciplinary manner. The Integrated Teacher Education Programme, popularly known as ITEP (NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, 2021), proposed under the policy is one of the finest example of promoting multidisciplinary approach to learning. This is discussed in detail in the later part of this paper.

### *Content Acquisition to Developing Competencies*

The policy proposes a spectrum built on multiple aspects of learning across each stage of learning consequently shifting the focal point from content acquisition to developing subject-based competencies. It is proposed in the policy and eventually followed in the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING, 2023) and National Credit Framework for Higher Education (DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION & LITERACY, 2023). These documents discuss in details the significance of describing learning outcomes; elaborating competencies cutting across the disciplinary boundaries and suggesting pedagogy to accomplish the goals of learning. The context of the student and the curriculum is identified as the basic guiding principle.

Curriculum developers and Teachers should have the autonomy to define Learning Outcomes as appropriate to their classroom contexts, while maintaining the connection to the Competencies. (DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION & LITERACY, 2023, p.60)

### *Research Based Approach to Learning*

With a focus on development of subject-specific competencies the policy lays emphasis on promoting research skills among students and teachers alike. The word research appears 105 times in the policy document. It covers all the possible dimensions, essential for enhancement in the quality of education, which can be accomplished through

research whether that involves nurturing the existing practices or evolving new approaches to teaching and learning.

Thus, this Policy envisions a comprehensive approach to transforming the quality and quantity of research in India. This includes definitive shifts in school education to a more play and discovery- based style of learning with emphasis on the scientific method and critical thinking. This includes career counselling in schools towards identifying student interests and talents, promoting research in universities, the multidisciplinary nature of all HEIs and the emphasis on holistic education, the inclusion of research and internships in the undergraduate curriculum, faculty career management systems that give due weightage to research, and the governance and regulatory changes that encourage an environment of research and innovation. All of these aspects are extremely critical for developing a research mindset in the country. (NEP 2020, Point 17.8)

Policy proposes establishment of a National Research Foundation (NRF) to encourage teachers and students develop research acumen. It is linked with the growth and development of the nation and the individual. It is expected that the annual assessment schedules for different programmes across each stage will also be revisited to ensure that progression is based on acquisition of stage-specific competencies and not rote memorization.

#### *Continuous Professional Development of Teachers at every stage*

The teachers at any stage of education as key implementers of any segment of the policy. The education planning and organization in post NEP 2020 period is exceptionally different from the system in which the teachers would have studied themselves. This poses a challenge at multiple levels. One of the most basic challenges is to accept that every student should have access to quality education. This refers to the belief system of the teachers. The other challenge is access to opportunities for professional development. The policy expects the teachers to be self-motivated to learn and share the evidence-based best practices with each other, In higher education the teachers are also expected to develop courses and plan assessment for the same. The policy recognizes that presently the institutional schedules and practices do not encourage such a professional approach to teaching. So, it has created provisions for the same at multiple places in the document.

Teachers will be given continuous opportunities for self-improvement and to learn the latest innovations and advances in their professions. These will be offered in multiple

modes, including in the form of local, regional, state, national, and international workshops as well as online teacher development modules. (NEP 2020, Point 5.15).

### *Focus on Creating Infrastructure for open and Distance Learning ODL*

The policy proposes to develop ODL across all stages of learning to promote access and skill acquisition/enhancement.

Institutions will have the option to run Open Distance Learning (ODL) and online programmes, provided they are accredited to do so, in order to enhance their offerings, improve access, increase GER, and provide opportunities for lifelong learning (SDG 4). (NEP 2020, Point 10.10)

Though the challenges of maintaining the quality of ODL programmes are discussed in the policy document, but the merit of ODL, most specifically, in enriching the learning experiences of those in remote locations or others who are in mid-career is seen as an advantage.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The policy visualizes education as means of inculcating constitutional values and creating democratic citizenship while taking pride in the cultural rootedness and learning all the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for becoming a competent professional with global reach. This is evident in the overall approach to every stage of education including liberal, professional, and vocational education deliberated at distinct situations in the policy. The projection of education as means for development of self is a critical high point of the policy. It is grounded in a sound understanding of relationship between self and society promoting the value of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* - a Sanskrit phrase that means *The World is One Family* as also *Ubuntu* - an ancient African word which is often described as a reminder that *I am because you/ we are*. It establishes an interconnectedness across different dimensions of education be it the stages or the partakers. The cohesiveness across multiple identities of *being* is ascribed as the goal of education at any age in an individual's life, exemplifying the conception of lifelong learning. Like every other policy document, it is also a vision document but with demonstrative potential of converting the vision to reality.

## **2. Part II - School Education**

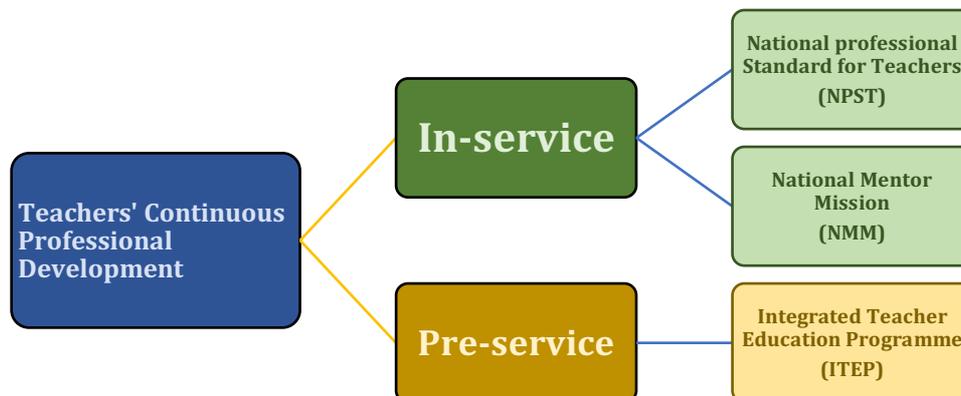
The policy has proposed radical changes in school education. The major components include, reorganizing the stages for age-appropriate curricular and pedagogical interventions; including children from age 3 years into formal educational planning, thus expanding the scope of Right to Education Act (2009) which covers children from age of 6 years to 14 years for free and compulsory education; pertinent focus on education of individuals/communities from socially and economically disadvantaged context; emphasis on acquiring competencies along with content; breaking through the prevailing hierarchy among different curricular areas; establishing the approach of assessment as learning; effective use of information and communication technology for enriched learning and outreach including individuals with disabilities.

The teachers are the at the core of creating effective and efficient system of knowledge. The students at every phase and stage require age-appropriate individualized approach to learning. With numbers being high here in India, the teachers need to be prepared to optimize the learning experiences of students both as collective and as individuals. This aspect is well comprehended in the policy. The discussions about the teacher preparation is built around the existing diversity in role of school teachers as also the expected evolving profile of the teachers to accomplish the purpose of education as described in the policy. This includes preparing teachers for addressing student diversity as well. The policy recognizes the spectrum of learning needs in the context of school education and proposes teacher development programmes as per the interest of the teachers. This is a unique initiative.

Each teacher will be expected to participate in at least 50 hours of CPD opportunities every year for their own professional development, driven by their own interests. (NEP 2020, Point 5.15).

This thought is further strengthened through other related documents and processes like National Professional Standards for Teachers Available at:(NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, 2023) and National Mentor Mission (NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, 2022). Teacher preparation programmes are envisioned as per the need and scope of specific stage of schooling. It included both the in-service and the pre-service programmes.

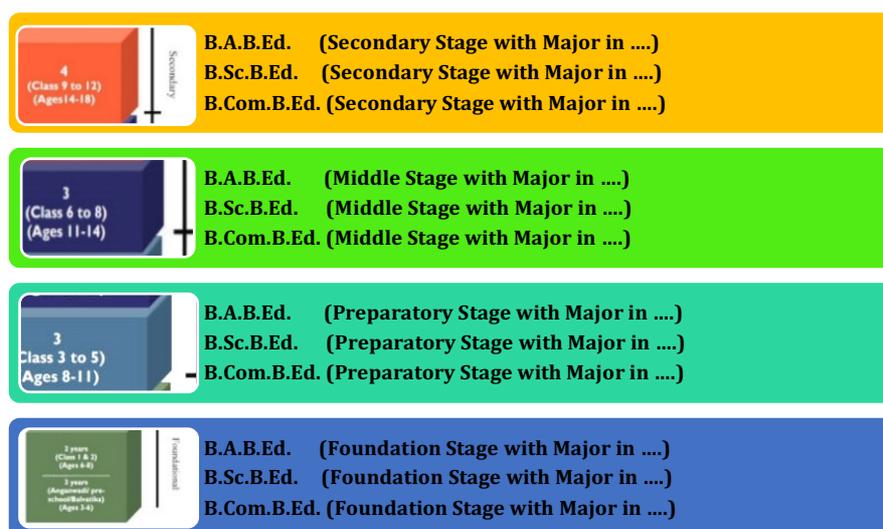
**Figure 4 - Teaching as a Profession in NEP 2020**



Source: Prepared by the author

Before NEP 2020, the pre-service teacher training programme undermined the value of liberal education for teachers teaching till primary stage grade levels (I-V). The curriculum for these programmes majorly discussed the foundation of education with pedagogical practices as deemed fit for that stage of schooling. This was problematic at two levels. One it limited the teacher-trainee's prospects to learning higher order thinking skills in absence of any opportunities to engage with the disciplinary specific courses at undergraduate level and two it assumed that since the curricular content in primary stage is very basic anyone can teach it just by knowing the social context of learning along with age-appropriate pedagogies. This diluted understanding of teaching-learning processes in early years of schooling has dented the primary education system in India most specifically in the last three decades. The NEP 2020, founded in the belief that every moment of learning requires a professionally matured handholding has proposed four equally rigorous teacher preparation programmes, one for each stage.

**Figure 5 - Nomenclature of Stage-Specific Degree Awarded for ITEP**



Source: Prepared by the author based on NEP 2020

As teacher education requires multidisciplinary inputs, and education in high-quality content as well as pedagogy, all teacher education programmes must be conducted within composite multidisciplinary institutions. The 4-year integrated B.Ed. offered by such multidisciplinary HEIs will, by 2030, become the minimal degree qualification for school teachers. The 4-year integrated B.Ed. will be a dual-major holistic Bachelor's degree, in Education as well as a specialized subject such as a language, history, music, mathematics, computer science, chemistry, economics, art, physical education, etc. (NEP 2020, Point 15.4; 15.5).

The Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) is conceptualised as a Dual-major undergraduate degree. It comes with the multiple entry exit option and ensures that the student after completion of the programme will have opportunities for vertical mobility in both the major that is Education as well as the other curricular area. The curricular structure of the programme includes Foundations of Education, Content cum Pedagogy Courses, Ability Enhancement Courses & Value-Added Courses, School Experience Programme and Community Engagement. This exemplifies the vision of NEP 2020 about an undergraduate programme. The curricular structure has flexibility to include research as an enriching component of the programme.

The initiatives for in-service teachers are focused upon developing them throughout their career facilitating the process of professional development while simultaneously addressing the issues of burnout and stagnation. The policy promised

instituting NPST (NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, 2023) and the regulatory body for teacher education in India, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), has established the system in place.

A common guiding set of Available at:(NPST) will be developed by 2022, by the National Council for Teacher Education. The standards would cover expectations of the role of the teacher at different levels of expertise/stage, and the competencies required for that stage. It will also comprise standards for performance appraisal, for each stage, that would be carried out on a periodic basis. (NEP 2020, Point 5.20)

The fundamental principles which guide the policy mentions 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system (NEP 2020). The NPST is conceptualized and designed as a guiding document for setting-up of an effective learning ecology in schools.

The school teachers demonstrate a great amount of zeal and resilience to empower the students in the school. Yet a one-time training is not sufficient to meet the challenges during the length of professional journey. The policy envisioned a National Mentor Mission (NMM) (NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, 2022) to continuously nurture the professional skills of the teachers and also provide a platform to teachers to share their expertise with other teachers as mentors in a systematic manner. In this dynamic world the teachers are facing complex unpredictable situations. The bionetwork of school teachers is large. This idea of NMM is based on a self-reliant model wherein a teacher proficient in one area will foster the professional skills of other teachers. Every teacher has the opportunity to be a mentee or the mentor. The system is built on the premise that the teachers understand each other's circumstances and can be supportive to each other.

### *Concluding Remark*

The policy takes into account the multiple foci in school education in a comprehensive manner. It envisions an ecosystem wherein the roles and responsibilities of every segment is clearly depicted. The intersectionality is well defined and the unique positions are respected equally. It addresses the basic issues related with dropout and out of school children in a composite form.

There are two overall initiatives that will be undertaken to bring children who have dropped out back to school and to prevent further children from dropping out. The first is to provide effective and sufficient infrastructure so that all students have access to safe and engaging school education at all levels from pre-primary school to Grade 12. The second is to achieve universal participation in school by carefully tracking students, as well as their learning levels, in order to ensure that they (a) are enrolled in and attending school, and (b) have suitable opportunities to catch up and re-enter school in case they have fallen behind or dropped out. (NEP 2020, Points 3.2; 3.3)

The idea of overall well-being of students is discussed and the provisions are created for the same.

Children are unable to learn optimally when they are undernourished or unwell. Hence, the nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be addressed, through healthy meals and the introduction of well-trained social workers, counsellors, and community involvement into the schooling system. (NEP 2020, Point 2.9)

The implementation of policy requires converting a vision into reality and developing designs that are effectively replicable across different contexts with multiple partakers. The school-community connect is reinforced through the policy with an inbuilt approach to acknowledging, accepting and respecting the local context of every student. This student-focused approach to planning and organizing the school education is the highpoint of the policy and it necessitates reimagining the roles of students and teachers in a school. The teacher is expected to be self-motivated, and the student is required to be a proactive learner. The curriculum construction will also be a complex procedure as it will demand maintaining the rigor of the content in coherence with the time required for participative pedagogy to inculcate the subject-based competencies at a given stage of schooling. The successful implementation of the policy thus, calls for understanding the vision with which the policy is proposed.

### **3 - Part III - NEP 2020: A Critique**

The policy is proposed by the government of the nation. So, the policy planners and thinkers in education discuss the policy with a political lens. While the practitioners are more concerned about planning and organizing the institutional structures and procedures to accomplish the outcomes. Similarly, the critique of the NEP 2020 is also two-fold. There are documented historical evidence about destruction of knowledge

centers like Takshashila and Nalanda University. Much later the education system promoted in the colonial period ensured that all the cultural practices and knowledge systems in the country were established as inferior. In post-colonial India the same conception of education was defended as contemporary and continued. With specific reference to school education there are three major documents available for discussion and reference, Kothari Commission Report (1964-66); National Policy on Education – NPE 1986 and National Education Policy - NEP 2020. The educational planning in post-colonial India can also be understood in these three eras- One from Kothari Commission to NPE 1986; Two between NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 and third as post NEP 2020. There have been multiple socio-political changes across the last seven decades in India and each of these has impacted the process of education. Also, each of these three documents are developed with a foresight to enhance the development of nation. What makes the NEP 2020 different from the earlier two is the vision about purpose of education. This redefined focus on education as means to development of self and others has completely altered the landscape of education in India. With the idea of self comes the association with community. Tracing back to the early knowledge systems the NEP 2020 envisions individual placed in a social context. This is exactly the point of ideological convergence. There are documented evidence of marginalization based on the social identity of an individual. Hence, it can be frightening for many that older structures will be reinstated. These fears find value when the document is read with an ideologue's intention. The most contingent aspect here is choice of content.

Curriculum content will be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis based learning. (NEP 2020, Point 4.5)

The policy while emphasizing on rootedness for every individual has redefined the interconnectedness between self and others. This also means that the culture of the individuals and communities are not compared, and each one is respected equally. Consequentially, the local knowledge, Art, Craft and Human Values are promoted as part of the curricular structure. For many this is frightening as they may lose their privileges built across a timeline by demeaning the others who were dismissed as incompetent due to their native identities. In the period between 1990-2020, the public school system promoted overloaded content and assessment based on rote memorization, curtailing the

possibility of developing higher order thinking skills among children from disadvantaged backgrounds which led to maintaining the status-quo, ensuring upward mobility of select few only. Whereas a simultaneous system of private education with better curricular structure and pedagogical approaches was developed parallel to this public school system of education. These parallel universes in school education were created intentionally to use education as a tool to reinforce exclusion at a systemic level since further opportunities were accordingly, coupled. So, any discord about the choice of content is unfounded when the purpose is development of critical thinking. The content in any subject is always selected. It is practically impossible to provide all knowledge as curriculum. But, in absence of critical insights the chosen content will lead to conditioning of minds.

The home language as the medium of instruction is yet another point raised as a critique of the policy. The inherent view in here is that English as a medium of instruction raises the quality of education. In a way it is correct also, since in the past so many years no effort is made in developing curricular materials in different languages. But this can be accomplished since the wise language experts are available in the country to do the needful. In fact, the government has constituted a *Bhartiye Bhasha Samiti* to develop the curricular materials in twenty-two languages recognized as per the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of Constitution of India.

In the past, the people have been discriminated on the basis of medium of learning with special status being attached to English and when people learnt English they are being ridiculed for pronunciation and fluency. The policy brings hope and respect for all the people of India growing up in a diverse language matrix. The language landscape of the nation is extremely complex with intersectionality across language and dialects. So, the children will still need to learn in a standardized language since every home language may not have the syntax or vocabulary to become a medium of instruction. But most definitely this will break the stereotypes surrounding the regional languages and accents creating inclusive social and work places. The people will be enthused to make an effort and focus much more on the idea instead of rejecting others for the need of prescribed ways of communication.

Another point of critique is built around vocational education as a proposed focus of education. India has considerable number of young people in the country. The contribution of every citizen of the country can boost the economy to an unprecedented

level. Recognizing this strength in the people the policy has proposed vocational education to nurture the skills of the youth. Gandhi's philosophy of education-*Basic Education* also promoted skill-based education.

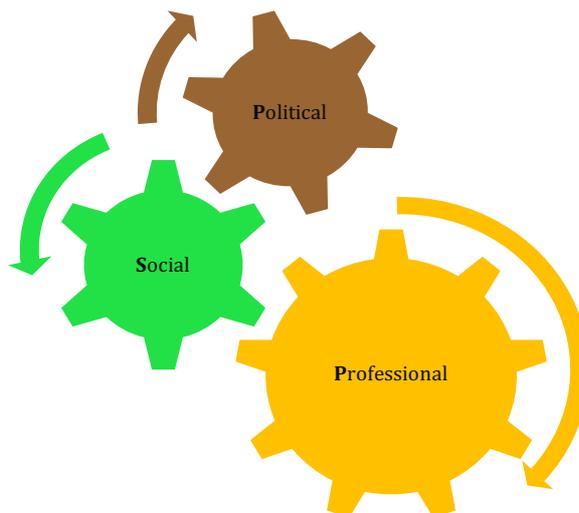
Every student will take a fun course, during Grades 6-8, that gives a survey and hands-on experience of a sampling of important vocational crafts, such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc., as decided by States and local communities and as mapped by local skilling needs. (NEP 2020, Point 4.26)

But somehow in the past through a systematic pattern the dignity of work by hand and of those people engaged in that work has been compromised. It continues to be a large question whether this advocacy is only for the rights of people or is chaotically entwined with the larger agenda to promote the market for machines.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The policy presents a paradigm shift in approach to thinking, planning and organizing education. It is presented in 21<sup>st</sup> century but encompasses knowledge traditions from the last five thousand years. It is bound to pose challenges for people who are accustomed to colonial forms of education and critiquing the inert nature of education without making any effort to bring in a change that will impact the life of last person in the sequence. In this paradigm shift the epistemological and ontological positions about teacher education are redefined. Consequentially, the old set of questions and methods become redundant and new ways of thinking about education across different stages are required.

### **Figure 6 – Political, Social and Professional (PSP) Model for Optimizing Learning**



Source: Prepared by the author

The PSP model for optimizing learning above, is proposed as a conclusion in this discussion. It exhibits an intertwined relationship between Political, Social, and Professional aspects for effective education. The political segment here, is accomplished with NEP 2020 in place. The professional segment is being planned and organized for effective implementation of the policy. The third important segment needs due focus. The social aspect for optimizing learning, essentially requires a shift in the belief system of every participant in this process. Engaging community in the process is a vital step. The statutory departments under government of India have launched various schemes and curriculum structures for successful implementation of the policy. The quality of education is often linked with presence of infrastructural and other types of resources. In here, the redefined purpose of education as proposed by the NEP2020 holds the potential to become a game-changer in context of education in India.

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