

QUALITY EDUCATION – A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Dr. M.Nirmala, Assistant Professor of English Government Degree College for Women
Begumpet, Hyderabad.

New Education Policy 2020, with its refreshingly new design and structure, has been heralding a new era to the Indian Education system. By revamping and redesigning the entire structure, methodology and the expected outcome of higher education altogether, NEP is adding new vigor and vitality, which would certainly pave way to the empowerment of Indian youth with the required skill set. As India is emerging as a powerful nation in the global scenario, and “Education is a powerful weapon to bring in the required changes” in a given society; it is extremely important at this juncture to conduct a comprehensive review about the educational structure and the various methods in existence, and to bring in the required modifications for rejuvenation, which would result in preparing a future ready human capital and thus propel the progress of the Nation further.

In order to bring social and economic well-being, peace and prosperity among the world nations, UNO has identified and adopted certain Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015, which are to be achieved globally by 2030. “Quality Education” and Gender Equality” stand in the fourth and fifth place of the 17 SDGs. All the developing nations including India, are making sincere efforts to achieve these goals by prioritizing quality education, health facilities and gender sensitization programs on their agenda. As Nelson Mandela rightly pointed out “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world”¹ India’s New Education Policy is promising a bright and progressive transformation through skill-based education, for empowerment of youth towards self-reliance and entrepreneurship and thereby contributes for bridging the gap between the marginalized and the privileged classes.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who’re furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls.²

India is a progressing nation and has the largest number of young people, which can be converted into the biggest advantage for the country’s progress, if only their energy and skills are channelised in an appropriate manner. Hence NEP which came after a gap of thirty six years, has been introduced at the right moment, with appropriate structure and design, which would certainly orient the path towards skill-based education. However, the real challenge lies in the implementation is an undeniable fact. In a vast country like India, with extremely large and diverse population, implementation of NEP may face some challenges, but a resolute and committed administrative and academic monitoring will certainly bring in the anticipated outcome. The synergy of various stakeholders such as Intelligentsia, Policy makers, Educationists and the teaching fraternity working at the grass root level together play an important role in the successful implementation of the NEP 2020.

Some of the fundamental principles of the NEP are a ‘light but tight’ regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment; a rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions. (NEP pg5)³

The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for the complete realization and liberation of the self. (NEP pg 4)⁴

NEP aims that India should become an educational hub in the ever-evolving global scenario. Optimistically it can be said that what the liberalization policy of 1990s did to the finance sector in India, the New Education Policy will do the same to the education sector, and would rejuvenate it from the core.

The previous policies on Education, NPE 1986 have actualized the target of Universalization of Elementary Education to a great extent, through schemes such as Free Compulsory Education; and now the focus is on Skill based Education. NEP 2020 recommends the diffusion of conventional and vocational courses, and thereby giving rise to the right admixture of these two, which would enable the youth to acquire the required skills to work in various fields as per their interest and capability. NEP's recommendation to integrate the industrial training and job-ready skills into the UG courses would certainly result in creating Self-reliant India (Aatma Nirbhar Bharat) as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, NEP is catering to the mandate of the Sustainable Development Goal "Quality Education".

Some of the key features of NEP such as Multi-disciplinary Educational Institutions offering variety of courses, Academic Credit Bank, Multiple Entry and Exit options provide the students with utmost flexibility regarding the choice of the courses or combinations and the time period for completion of a given course. NEP is inviting global universities into the country, which would provide the students with a unique opportunity to take a combined degree from different institutions, and thereby deriving the best out of the both. Promotion of Online learning through content development and dissemination of knowledge is another area of focus in NEP; in order to achieve this target of skilling on scale, various online courses are designed through MOOCS and the content is made available in as many as twelve regional languages till now and the project is under progress. Telecast of live and recorded lessons through various Television channels is another measure in this direction.

Achieving hundred per cent Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) at school level by 2030 is another major target of NEP; and it finds promotion of regional languages as a key factor to achieve this target. As propounded by scholars and educationists across the world, learning at early stages in one's own mother tongue would certainly enhance the learning levels of a child; NEP's recommendation to promote primary education in regional languages is a remedial measure to break the language barrier, and would go a long way in enhancing the children's physical and psychological growth as multilingualism has great cognitive benefits on young minds. This would also reduce the dropout rate, if any, in the Primary or Secondary Education sector.

However, Shreya Khaitan from Language and Learning Foundation argues about the implementation of the scheme in a multilingual environment such as of India.

Early schooling in a child's mother tongue, as recommended in the new [National Education Policy](#), can improve learning, increase student participation and reduce the number of dropouts, according to an **IndiaSpend** analysis of evidence from around the world. However, this would need new books, fresh teacher training and more funding, experts said. Also, given the multiplicity of languages and dialects in India, it is difficult to home in on the one that can be used as the medium of instruction in an area.⁵

As per the NEP, the aim of using regional languages is not just to improve a child's learning outcomes, but also for "instilling knowledge of India". This "is considered critical for purposes of national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation, and integration"... however this initiative of instruction in regional language at early age is also aimed at inculcating the national integrity and love for mother land.⁶

Gender Equality is another Sustainable Development Goal for the world nations and the New Education Policy also focuses on this area through the policy of "Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All." Education is a great leveller and helps a lot in bridging the gender and social gaps; hence the special focus on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). Gender identities such as female and transgender groups, and sociocultural identities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other underrepresented groups, migrant labourers come under this category of SEDGs. While the overall enrolment ratio of these SEDGs keep declining from Primary to Secondary to Higher Education sectors, the intersectionality of gender increases it further.

It's a known fact that till the end of twentieth century, Higher Education for a girl child is optional and the responsibility of marriage of the girl child and availability of a suitable groom, the dowry system and the lack of financial resources are some of the social pressures and factors which influence the parents of the girl children to force their girls into early marriages. However, now the studies show a steady increase in the enrolment of girls into Higher Education Institutions and Universities, but it has to be enhanced further. Hence the NEP lays special emphasis on education for girl children.

As per the recommendations of the NEP, certain changes are made to the syllabus of semester V and VI of UG courses of State Universities, where a component of Gender Sensitization is introduced as part of English Language Teaching syllabus from the academic year 2021-22. Poems and Prose lessons are taken from the feministic writings of distinguished authors such as Jamaica Kincaid, Chimamanda Adichie, Elizabeth Ralph Mertz etc. The inaugural speech given by Emma Watson, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador on the occasion of inaugural of the "HeforShe" campaign on September 20, 2014 is incorporated into the syllabus as a prose lesson⁶. This is a very good initiative towards creating the right awareness among the youth, which may help in erasing and rewriting the deeply entrenched thought patterns of a male dominated society. Thus, the Vision and Mission of New Education Policy are catering to the mandate of Sustainable Development Goals of "Quality Education" and "Gender Equality". Hence it is appropriate to look forward for the efficient implementation of NEP, which would certainly put India on a high pedestal, not only as one of the three largest economies in the world, but also as a "Vibrant Knowledge Society", which is perfectly encapsulated in the Vision of NEP as follows:

National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower... 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, pg6)⁷

References

1. Google Quotes
<https://www.google.com/search?q=education+is+the+most+powerful+weapon&sxsrf=APq-WBtwSj8ngKVHSlbxlrh7nF2-18.3.2022/3pm>
2. Sustainable Development Goals https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQjw29CRBhCUARIsAOboZbJmCszdiTjMlIZE7iqCp2WmkXYVOVUPzM29yjQ_oNYwQm1waei22IaAqPPEALw_wcB/ 18.03.2022/3pm
3. New Education Policy <https://sarkarireader.com/new-education-policy/> 18.3.2022/3pm
4. New Education Policy <https://sarkarireader.com/new-education-policy/> 18.3.2022/3pm
5. Why Early Learning In Mother Tongue Is More Effective By Shreya Khaitan, 12 Aug 2020
6. <https://www.indiaspend.com/why-early-learning-in-mother-tongue-is-more-effective-but-hard-to-implement-in-india/>
7. *English in Action*, Macmillan Publishers India Private Limited, ISBN:9789354550560, 2021.
8. New Education Policy <https://sarkarireader.com/new-education-policy/> 18.3.2022/3pm