

Transformative Potential of NEP 2020: A Comprehensive Analysis of its Impact on School Education, the Right to Education, and Social Work Profession



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Abstract

There are very few Indian Acts and Policies that have acknowledged the Social Work Profession. One of the greatest things that the National Education Policy 2020 has done is that it has recognised the need for a Professional Social Worker in the school setting. The research paper examines what NEP 2020 has to give in the area of School Education, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, and the Social Work Profession. The study is based on the RTE Act of 2009, the NEP-2020 and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 hence document analysis method is used. Content analysis of secondary data has been done to see the possible impacts of the policy. The article has three segments. The first segment discusses what NEP 2020 has to offer in the domain of School Education. The second segment is about how it is going to impact the RTE Act, 2009, and in the third segment, we will talk about the opportunities and challenges that the policy is going to put in front of Professional Social Workers. The findings highlight that while NEP 2020 advocates for an inclusive and holistic education through curriculum and early childhood care reforms, it deviates from the RTE paradigm in overemphasising performance-based evaluations and public-private partnerships. Also, the policy extends new institutional tasks for school social workers by realising their role in reducing dropouts, mental health improvement, and child protection. This study concludes that the successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires a collective effort of all policy thinkers, educators, and social work professionals in bringing its transformative vision into realist settings.

Keywords: NEP 2020, School Education, Social Work Profession, Right to Education

Introduction

Avijit Pathak, in his work "Social Implications of Schooling", provides an interpretation of "Education" as the transmission of knowledge, tradition, and culture from one generation to the next. Further, he defines "School" as a formal educational institution where professionals convey their knowledge and skills. He views the school as a key player in social mobility, which acts as an agent of social change and fosters uniformity and upholds universalistic values. According to Pathak, while Education stands out as a powerful

means for fostering an equitable and just society, School plays a pivotal role in driving social transformation and advocating for standardized and universally embraced values. To put all educational institutions within a framework of law, we need educational policy. To protect individual constitutional rights, to provide equal access to education, and to safeguard students, parents, and teachers we need educational laws/legislations.

The NEP 2020 stays as a landmark document, heralding a new era in the landscape of educa-

tion in India. This policy, with its ambitious vision and transformative goals, has implications that reach far beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. In this research article, we delve deeply into a comprehensive examination of the “Transformative Capacity of NEP 2020”. Our focus is particularly on its far-reaching effects on school education, the Right to Education, and the substantial responsibilities it bestows upon the domain of social work.

The policy emerges as a catalyst for change, re-defining the contours of learning and development. As we delve into the intricate layers of this policy, we aim to unravel its potential to reshape the educational landscape, ensuring inclusivity, quality, and relevance for learners across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. We scrutinize the policy’s provisions, analyzing how they align with the constitutional mandate of providing equitable educational opportunities for every child. Beyond the realms of formal education, it underscores the key role of the social work profession in catalyzing the policy’s transformative agenda. Social workers, as change agents, are uniquely positioned to tackle the multifaceted challenges of the education sector. We investigate the policy’s recognition of the social work profession and its potential contributions to fostering an inclusive, child-centric, and rights-based educational system.

The intent of this academic work

- To see what the policy has to offer in the domain of School Education,
- To observe the Right to Education in NEP 2020, and
- To identify prospects and challenges that the policy provides to the Social Work Profession.

Research Methodology

To examine the transformative potential of the NEP 2020 in respect of the RTE Act, 2009 and Social Work Profession, the study adopted a qualitative research design based on document and content analysis. For conducting an in-depth exploration of the intent, interpretive dimensions and implications of the policy qualitative

approach was chosen. This study was based on secondary data obtained mainly from these three documents keeping in view their relevance to school education and their perspectives on access, quality and governance in education:

- National Education Policy, Part1. School Education (30 pages)
- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (16 pages)- along with its amendments.
- Annual Status of Education Report 2022

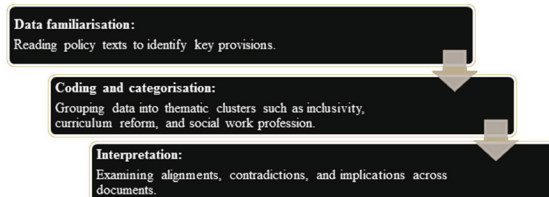


Fig. 1: Stages of Analysis

Interpretations were cross-checked with existing literature and government sources. As this study is secondary data based its findings are interpretative rather than empirical. In future field-based research can be built on the insights of this study.

The Policy

Intending to promote and regulate education, the Indian Government formulates a policy on education. It addresses both primary and higher education in India. India had three educational policies after independence till date, the first in 1968, the second in 1986, and the third and most recent one in 2020.

Under the deanship of Mr. T.S.R. Subramanian, a committee was established in 2015 to discuss and prepare a draft report on education policy. Adopting a bottom-up approach to policy formation, the committee welcomed the opinions of stakeholders from the gram-panchayat level to the national level. However, when this draft was deposited in the public sphere for discussion, several issues emerged. To take care of those, a new panel under the headship of Dr. K. Kasturirangan was established in June 2017. After considering all suggestions and raised objections, it came in the year 2020 on 29 July. This Bharat-Centric

policy aims to transform the Education System by 2030.

School Education in India

Research by Geeta Gandhi Kingdon in 2007 concluded that enrolments in elementary schools are about to be universal and literacy rates are increasing but India's performance in other aspects of school education is not good. Attendance rates in primary schools are very low, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Learning achievements are also very low, which shows poor-quality schooling. Teacher absenteeism is high while school facilities or inputs are low.

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022, the state of school education in India can be summarized as follows:

- The enrollment rate for the age cohort ranging from 6 to 14 years has risen from 97.2% in 2018 to 98.4% in 2022, despite the challenges posed by school closures during the pandemic. Over the last 15 years, this rate has consistently remained above 95%.
- Between 2006 and 2014, there was a decline in the proportion of children (aged 6 to 14 years) enrolled in government schools. However, from 2014 to 2017, this trend reversed, with the enrollment rate reaching 64.9%. In 2022, it further increased to 72.9%, compared to 65.6% in 2018.
- In 2006, the percentage of out-of-school girls (aged 11-14 years) was 10.3%, which decreased to 4.1% in 2018. In 2022, the percentage of girls in the 11-14 age group not enrolled in school stood at 2%.
- Attendance rates for both students and teachers have seen no significant change over the years. Student attendance has consistently hovered around 72%, while teacher attendance has slightly increased from 85.4% in 2018 to 87.1% in 2022.
- Positive developments related to the Right to Education include improvements in various indicators since 2018. The percentage of schools having usable girls' toilets increased from 66.4% in 2018 to 68.4% in 2022.

Schools having drinking water facilities also saw an increase from 74.8% to 76%.

- Sports-related indicators have remained relatively stable, with the percentage of schools having a playground reaching 68.9% in 2022, compared to 66.5% in 2018.

The earlier policies and initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal scheme, and the RTE Act, 2009 have made progress but disparities remain particularly for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups like females, transgenders, Scheduled Casts, Scheduled tribes, children from remote rural areas, children from urban slums, disabled children, orphans including child beggars and other vulnerable children. There was a necessity to rethink our education system, its vision, pedagogical practices, etc., and National Education Policy 2020 did this.

The Indian Constitution promises equal legal protection to every citizen. Challenges like illiteracy and gender disparity are rooted in the fabric of our society. Social workers, as professionals, possess the expertise and capabilities to adeptly tackle these challenges. They are enabled with the knowledge and skills necessary to safeguard the rights of marginalized sections.

School Education and National Education Policy 2020

As education is the base of social and economic development, each country needs an education policy that is well-defined and well-planned.

The policy has replaced the 10+2 structure with 5+3+3+4 covering the age group 3 to 18 years (Foundational stage: Preschool to Class 2, Age 3 to 8 years, Preparatory stage: Class 3 to 5, Age 8 to 11 years, Middle stage: Class 6 to 8, Age - 11 to 14 years, Secondary education -Class 9 to 12, Age-14 to 18 years). Keeping in mind that more than 85 percent of a child's brain development happens before the age of 6, strong investment has been recommended in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The National Council of Educational Research and Training has to create a national curricular and pedagogical framework for ECCE in two parts. One framework for

0 to 3 years and another for 3 to 8 years. These frameworks will guide parents and teachers. To ensure universal access to ECCE, Anganwadi must be strengthened. Anganwadi workers who have 10+2 and above qualifications will be trained for 6 months while less qualified workers will be trained for one year. It is estimated that over 5 crore students have not achieved foundational literacy and numeracy. Primary schools have to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025. To curtail the dropout rates professionally trained social workers or counselors will be appointed at schools or school complexes. These professionals will engage directly with students, their parents, and the communities to ensure the attendance of all children aged 3 - 18 in educational institutions.

The curriculum will be more flexible and textbooks will be less loaded with content. There will be a "single window system" operated by one agency and website that has to allow children from socio-economically disadvantaged groups to apply for all scholarships available to them.

Sachin and Ramesh (2022) highlighted that the obstacles in executing The National Education Policy 2020 primarily lie with existing infrastructure and molding teachers according to the aspirations of NEP 2020.

Right to Education

According to etymology, the word "Shiksha" has been taken from Sanskrit. It originated from the verb "शिक्ष्" (śikṣ) which means to study. Vidya, a Hindi synonym of "Shiksha" denotes "correct knowledge". This has been derived from "Vid" (विद्), a Sanskrit word that stands for "to reason upon."

Emerging during the 1530s, the term Education means child-rearing. It has been taken from the Latin word "education" which indicates training or rearing. It has been utilized for "systematic schooling and training for work" since the 1610s (Etimonline, n.d.).

As mentioned in Part IV of the Indian Constitution under Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 39 (f) speaks about providing "opportu-

nities and facilities to children to develop in a healthy manner and conditions of freedom and dignity" while Article 45 has the provision of free and compulsory education for children. The first formal document on "Education as Right" was the Ramamurti Committee Report of 1990. On 4th February, in the case of Unni Krishnan, J.P. & Others vs. State of Andhra Pradesh & Others, the Supreme Court of India perceived that "The citizens of this country have a fundamental right to education. This right flows from Article 21. Its contents and parameters have to be determined in the light of Article 41 and Article 45" (Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.). In 1999, the Tapas Majumdar Committee was established, which recommended to insertion of Article 21A. In December 2002, the "Right to Education" turned into a Fundamental Right (Article 21A) with the 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution. This was followed by the Right to Education Bill 2008 and eventually the Right to Education Act, 2009 came into existence. All infrastructure-related provisions had to be executed till March 2013 while all teachers had to be regulated and trained till March 2015 (Kumari and Verma, 2022).

The Act and The Policy

In principle, this Policy strengthens the Act. Because it protects the three most important education stakeholders, which are the students, the teachers, and the parents. A fresh curriculum and innovative pedagogies will prioritize the enhancement of students' technological skills. The curriculum of teacher's training will be also modified and now the teachers will be more trained. The parents will be more empowered by increasing their participation in the education.

Provisions of the policy in the light of the Act:

- The Act offers mandatory and cost-free education to children aged 6 to 14 years while the policy aspires to attain a hundred percent Gross Enrollment Ratio by 2030 in pre-school to secondary level.
- More emphasis on restructuring curriculum, pedagogies, and evaluation system, maintaining the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) by filling teacher vacancies in a time-bound manner

mainly in disadvantaged areas, areas with high PTR or low literacy rates, teaching in the mother tongue, providing better infrastructure, and teacher's training to increase accessibility to quality and equitable education.

- While the Act aims to eliminate child labor the policy can give it a new depth by upgrading the skill set of these students and hence making them industry-ready.
- The Act prohibited corporal punishment to assure the psychological well-being of children but the policy has brought it to the next level by proposing the recruitment of trained social workers or counselors in schools on a compulsory basis.
- The RTE Act 2009 aimed to curb unrecognized schools and coaching by government teachers while NEP 2020 went a step further by suggesting revising assessment frameworks to stop the coaching culture.

Hence, we can say that the policy not only ensures access like the Act, but it seeks to guarantee accessibility to quality education. It goes beyond the Act and concentrates on talking about the curriculum and pedagogies.

Contradictions between The Policy and The Act

- There are some proposals in the policy that contradict the Act. The policy strongly recommends taking an examination in Grades 3, 5, and 8 conducted by the competent authority while the Act prohibits it.
- Unlike the Act, the policy emphasizes outcomes, not inputs.
- "The requirements for schools will be less restrictive (section 3.6 of NEP 2020)". This is meant to invite non-government organizations, through public philanthropic partnerships. This might serve as a means to avoid the term private and to expand the market.
- Sharma and Singh in 2023 argued that the policy is rooted on the international education policy lexicon not on the real conditions of the Indian Education System.

- It promotes performance-based evaluation. This performance-focused ideology is not that suitable for our diversified country. Assessing children from different environments on similar parameters will be against the principles of social justice. Thus, educational rights of deprived children will not be completely protected.

The examination of the implications of NEP 2020 on the Act, reveals a dynamic interplay. While the policy aligns with and strengthens the act in many aspects, certain contradictions emerge, highlighting the need for nuanced implementation and synchronization of their objectives.

Social Work Profession

In July 2014, this global definition has been approved by the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) General Meeting and the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) General Assembly:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels."

Despite being established in 1936, it still seeks acceptance as a distinct profession in India, even though higher education programmes at various levels are available nationwide.

Social Work Profession and The Policy

The discipline, with its focus on social justice, community participation, and development can play an important role in achieving the NEP 2020 goal to build education more equitable, inclusive, and holistic. As the policy emphasizes the demand for a multidisciplinary approach to meet the diverse necessities of the students, here comes the the duty of Social Work professionals.

They will have to coordinate with parents, teachers, management and the community to identify, recognize, and nurture the individual strengths of every student. Being professionals in a school setting, they will need to focus on preventing delinquency, truancy, as well as addressing food insecurities.

The policy challenges the School Social Workers to prove themselves to others why a methodical approach is needed in the school setting.

Prospects and Challenges for the Profession

Considering the ecological systems approach, workers in school setting must address student issues through partnerships with parents, schools, and the community. Their duties include crisis management, facilitating group therapy sessions, identifying and reporting instances of child neglect and abuse, coordinating services for culturally and economically diverse populations, and pinpointing challenges in educational policies (Sachin & Ramesh, 2022).

To enhance learning there is a recommendation to involve community and alumni (senior citizens, literate volunteers, retired scientists/government employees) at schools in one-to-one tutoring, giving extra classes, and providing career guidance (section 3.7 of NEP 2020). This can increase sexual offenses against children, particularly among the second and third gender. While selecting such volunteers, social workers must be very cautious. If a large number of such volunteers will join the education system without any regulation this can also lower the quality of education.

School Social Workers also have a responsibility to look after the nutrition and health of children (section 2.9 of NEP 2020). By modifying the behavior of these children hygiene and sanitation can be introduced into their lifestyle while addressing their mental health will be a bit challenging due to the unavailability of sufficient funds.

If professionally trained social workers succeed in the proper implementation of NEP 2020 and root its vision and goals at the grassroots level, this may help the profession in establishing it as

a distinct profession. Now more Institutes will provide specialization in school social work for having practical exposure as well as extensive knowledge to work more effectively with students, teachers, parents, and communities. Furthermore, it is necessary to carry out research studies aimed at creating intervention models for school social work practitioners.

The profession dedicated to advocate for social justice and human rights, emerges as a key player in realizing NEP 2020's goals. The profession's multidisciplinary approach aligns with the policy's emphasis on addressing diverse student needs. These practitioners are uniquely positioned to facilitate community engagement, crisis intervention, and holistic student development.

However, challenges and contradictions persist. The policy's call for community involvement and alumni participation demands scrutiny to ensure child safety and maintain educational quality. The responsibility assigned to social workers in areas such as mental health, nutrition, and hygiene poses challenges, especially in resource-constrained environments.

Major Findings

The analysis disclosed alignments and contradictions between the policy and the act and rising opportunity for the social work profession in Indian Educational Landscape.

- The policy replaced the 10+2 model with a 5+3+3+4 structure covering early childhood (age 3) to secondary stage (age 18) with focus on ECCE, foundational literacy, curriculum represents the shift towards competency-based learning. It also acknowledges the need of psychosocial support for students by recommending the appointment of trained social worker.
- By reaffirming its emphasis on accessibility, inclusion and quality the policy strengthen the spirit of the act. Both advocate for gender parity and protection of child rights. The NEP extends the scope of compulsory education from pre-school to secondary level and aspires for 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio by 2030.

- Despite broad similarity, some provisions of the policy contradict the RTE framework. The policy mandated assessments in grade 3, 5, and 8 that may increase the performance pressure unlike the act that prohibited examinations until completion of primary education. The policy's emphasis on reduced regulator requirement for school (section 3.6) may open paths for increased privatization. This raises concerns about equity and social justice.
- The policy provided a renewed institutional space to professional social worker.

Conclusion

It turns out that the policy has huge potential in reshaping India's education ecosystem. In extending compulsory learning and advancing ECCE, it transcends the RTE Act, 2009. But less regulation for schools (3.6) creates room for privatisation and therefore represents a policy trade-off that could undermine RTE's equity-based objective.

The policy acknowledges the significance of social workers and their involvement in counseling, community engagement and children's right advocacy that aligns with the policy objective of fostering inclusive learning environments. For policymakers, this requires creating school social work programs in the public school system. For educators, it calls for multidisciplinary collaboration in curriculum delivery and student support. To social workers, it opens avenues for specialized training, evidence-based practice, and child rights advocacy within educational settings.

Future research should study empirically the implementation of NEP 2020 at the state level to capture regional inequality, effectiveness of school social workers in this role, and community outcomes. In this way, such research can guide refinements in the policy and assist in developing context-sensitive models of teaching and social work practice in India.

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