

**EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF INDIA'S NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 ON
ATTAINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL: CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS,
AND FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES**

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Abstract

By ensuring accessible and equitable quality education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone, SDG 4 will contribute significantly to the creation of societies that are resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in India serves as the necessary framework for SDG 4. This article prioritises the NEP's primary education component; the suitability of the pertinent provisions, difficulties it faces, and ideas for effectiveness are investigated or given herein which could help in fulfilling NEP's primary education aims and so ensure the achievement of SDG 4. This study discusses SDG 4, the primary education component of NEP 2020, the MDGs, the trajectory of Indian education policies from 1968, and their successes and failures while focusing on these three goals. The main issues include a shortage of qualified teachers, the use of ineffective teaching methods, poor school infrastructure, a focus on primary education's universalization rather than its quality, gender parity, the gap between rural and urban areas, and financial limitations. The strategies for bridging NEP's weaknesses and shortcomings to successfully implement SDG 4 are also covered.

The implementation aspect and efficient monitoring thereof should receive more focus. Periodic data collecting would be beneficial only if it resulted in meaningful analysis and actionable next steps to improve the delivery of high-quality education. Numerous assignments focusing on life skills and socioemotional abilities should be implemented in the classroom to support elementary education of the highest calibre. A coalition between governmental, business, and non-profit organisations is also being called for, as well as a multi-sectoral strategy.

Keywords:

NEP 2020, SDG, Primary Education, Implementation.

Introduction:

The first formal education that is commonly experienced is primary school, sometimes referred to as elementary education. It begins between the ages of 5-7 and ends between the ages of 11 and 13. Primary education is viewed by the International Standard Classification of Education as a single stage during which programming are often created to provide fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics and lay a solid basis for future learning. Children develop the fundamental skills necessary to prepare for life and civic engagement in primary school. A quality education empowers children and young people, safeguards their wellbeing, and breaks the cycle of poverty. Additionally, it promotes economic success and social cohesion. Aiming to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and to promote opportunities for lifelong learning for all by 2030, the sustainable

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development agenda, which was adopted by all UN member states in 2015, recognises the value of primary education in its Goal 4. This goal includes a target on universal access to basic education. To develop education, several international programmes like the "Global Education First Initiative" and "Education for All" are launched, and every country establishes its own national policies to do so. India has also pursued three education policies since gaining its independence. India's first and second national education plans, which were enacted in 1968 and 1986, respectively, were modified in 1992. And in the most recent year of 2020, the third national education policy was announced. The most recent policy is based on the five SDG 4 initiatives' core pillars: "Access, Quality, Equity, Affordability, and Accountability."

India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) marks a significant paradigm shift in the country's approach to education. The policy, which came after a gap of 34 years, sets forth a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming India's educational landscape to meet the demands of the 21st century. NEP 2020 outlines ambitious goals to enhance access, equity, quality, and research in education and aligns them with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on Quality Education. As of 2023, India faces formidable challenges in the education sector, with a staggering number of out-of-school children, regional disparities, and concerns about the quality of education. Recent statistical data reveals that [insert relevant statistics here, e.g., enrollment rates, literacy rates, gender disparities, etc.]. These challenges underscore the urgency of implementing NEP 2020 effectively.

The field of education in India currently occupies a major place on a worldwide scale. India is home to the greatest network of higher learning institutions in the world, each of which offers significant chances for expansion. It was estimated that the entire worth of the education sector was over 117 billion U.S. dollars, and this is anticipated to rise up to 225 billion U.S. dollars by 2025, with the ed-tech industry estimated to achieve roughly 30 billion U.S. dollars by 2031. In addition, the total worth of the education sector is likely to grow up to 225 billion U.S. dollars by 2025. Children in India begin their formal education as early as the age of two, when they enrol in pre-nursery or playschool. The Indian government requires that all children between the ages of six and fourteen complete their primary education. Secondary school in India typically lasts for a total of four years, beginning at age 14 and ending until the student is 18. Reports indicate that since the pandemic, the number of schools has decreased, which has led to a reduction in the number of students enrolling in elementary schools. On the other hand, the number of pupils enrolled in secondary schools climbed to 25.6 billion in 2022. In addition, the gender gap in elementary education was narrower for female students in the years 2021 and 2022 than it had been previously.

This paper seeks to investigate into the multifaceted impact of India's National Education Policy 2020 on attaining SDG 4, while acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead. It explores the prospects of the policy in bridging educational gaps and fostering innovation and research within the Indian education system. Furthermore, it identifies potential areas for future research and policy development that can further strengthen India's pursuit of sustainable development through education. Through a comprehensive analysis of NEP 2020's key provisions and their implications, this study aims to shed light on the transformative potential of the policy and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the future of education in India. In doing so, it endeavors to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, researchers, and stakeholders concerned with realizing the global commitment to quality education and sustainable development.

Objectives of the research:

The following aims are to be attained by the research:

1. To assess, with an emphasis on the primary school component, the Indian government's efforts to achieve SDG 4 for education.
2. To talk on how India's national education policies have changed.
3. To address the difficulties that primary education faces.

Related work: In order to attain sustainable development, it is imperative for all nations to commit to the implementation of global goals by the year 2030 (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020). A department has been established by the United Nations (UN) with the purpose of offering substantial help to countries in their pursuit of sustainability. The main objective of this study is to analyse the effects of Sustainable Development Goal 4, with a specific focus on primary education. Muf et al. (2017) assert that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a fundamental basis for ensuring the enduring sustainability of the planet. These objectives particularly target the identified concerns and aim to actively achieve a resolution. SDG 4, as part of the broader framework of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), centres its attention on the establishment and advancement of an inclusive and sustainable educational system that caters to the needs of all individuals. According to Pandey (2018), India has made significant progress in implementing the "Education for All" project. The Fundamental Right of free and compulsory education is extended to all children in the age range of six to twelve. Numerous substantial projects and policies have been implemented to facilitate the realisation of this objective. The examination of the significant challenges faced by the Indian educational system, which have implications for both the accessibility and quality of education, necessitates governmental attention. Beena (2019) highlighted India's dedication to ensuring universal access to inclusive and superior education for every kid by the year 2030. The Right to Education (RTE) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are two prominent initiatives that have significantly enhanced the educational landscape in India.

Methodology: The study paper represents an attempt with exploratory research design, utilising secondary data sourced from research articles, relevant journals, official websites, and other similar sources. The research data and objectives are obtained from reputable sources such as UNESCO, United Nations Reports, Niti Aayog, ASER Reports, MHRD, and the Government of India.

Transition from MDGs to SDGs – General Prologue: World leaders committed to eight explicit and quantifiable development goals at the United Nations Millennium Summit (September 2000), which eventually became to be known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To gauge the results, 8 MDGs, 18 targets and 48 indicators were used and 2015 was kept as the intended year to achieve these goals. Of which Goal 2 is “Achieve Universal Primary Education”. Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Throughout that period, there was a lack of global consistency in the eight goals’ accomplishment, with some countries making large improvements while others made little to no progress. Hence, MDGs had some restrictions and further scope, although being a step in the right direction.

In order to continue fostering international cooperation for a better future, the UN updated the framework in 2015 and added SDGs. The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) defined Sustainable Development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The SDGs are a group of 17 goals, 169 associated targets and 230 indicators outlined by the United Nations in 2015 to specify the course of global development for the ensuing 15 years until 2030. Goal 4 of SDG deals with “Quality Education”.

Planning and initiatives for global development have undergone significant transformation in the recent decades. A more integrated and sustainable strategy is being adopted. The transition from the MDGs to the SDGs has been a long but steady fulfilment of human ability to cooperate for the common good. It went from a top-down strategy to one of the largest collaborative undertakings with a more sustainable and inclusive approach.

SDGs: an improved version- Compared to MDGs, SDGs are more ambitious and are based on the idea that development must be socially, ecologically and economically sustainable. The MDGs were

created by a group of professionals in the UN's basement, whereas the SDGs were developed after a protracted consultation procedure that included participation from 70 open working groups, civil society organizations, and the general public through meetings and online surveys. MDGs were funded by wealthy nations and focused on poor nations, but SDGs call for all nations, developed or developing, to work towards achieving them. Moreover, for MDGs, 1990 was used as the baseline data year, whereas 2015 was taken as the baseline data year for SDGs, which is more recent. And SDG being based on a comprehensive approach aims to make sure that the momentum induced by the MDGs is maintained past 2015 but with sustainability.

MDGs to SDGs: Primary Education Goal; Achievements and Pitfalls

Even though much has been achieved, much is left to be achieved as is evident from the facts expatiated herein. As per the UN's MDGs Report, 2015 global out-of-school children of primary school age has reduced to an estimated 57 million in 2015 from 100 million in 2000. The primary school net enrolment rate in the developing regions has reached 91 per cent in 2015, up from 83 per cent in 2000. And yet in some developing countries many children of primary education age do not attend school, and many children who begin primary school do not complete it. According to 2012 estimates, 43 per cent of out-of school children globally will never go to school. Almost half of out-of-school girls (48 per cent) are unlikely to ever go to school, compared to 37 per cent of boys. On the other hand, boys are more likely to leave school early. Household wealth remains an important determinant of a child's likelihood of attending school. For instance, 2008–2012 survey data from 63 developing countries show that children in the poorest households were four times as likely to be out of school as children in the richest households. The data also shows that the average out-of-school rate in rural areas was twice as high (16 per cent) as the rate in urban areas (8 per cent). Disability is another major impediment to accessing education. In India, for instance, more than one third of children and adolescents aged 6 to 13 who live with disabilities are out of school.

In the foreword to UN's "The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2022", Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General, laments that owing to various crises the aspirations set out in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development are in jeopardy and the report provides evidence of destructive impacts of the same in achieving SDGs. Chapter 4 of the report deals with Quality Education. Covid-19 pandemic has deepened a crisis in education with severe disruptions in education systems worldwide. An estimated 147 million children missed more than half of their in-person instruction during the Covid period and as a result this generation of children could lose a combined total of 17 trillion USD in life time earnings (in current value). Pandemic-related school closures threaten to reverse years of progress aimed at keeping children in school. The longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return. The UNESCO report, 2022 proposes that 24 million learners from pre-primary to university level are at risk of not returning to school. Based on pre-pandemic data from 2015 to 2019, the proportion of children meeting the minimum required proficiency in reading at the end of lower-secondary school was between 70 and 90 per cent in most high-income countries. That proportion fell below 60 per cent in almost all middle- and low-income countries, dropping to less than 10 per cent in some countries. It is found that entrenched inequities in education only worsened during the pandemic. Globally 25% of primary schools (2019-2020) lack electricity, drinking water and sanitation. And 50 % lack computers and internet. Sustainable Development Report 2022 published by Cambridge University Press states that many countries around the world currently fall short of SDG 4 target.

Evolution of Education Policies in India

National Policy on Education, 1968

Much before the MDGs came into existence, India was serious enough to lay emphasis on education. First National Policy on Education was launched in 1968 based on the report and recommendations of Kothari Commission (1964-66). It called for radical restructuring and providing equal opportunities for citizens across the nation in education besides exhorting for free and compulsory education for all

children upto the age of 14 years. It focused on the successful completion of the prescribed course for all enrolled students. It highlighted the need to improve the educational facilities for handicapped children and focused on students from rural, backward, tribal areas with special emphasis on the education of the girl children. As is evident from the minimal statistics below (detailed statistics are provided in the later part) the policy failed to materialise the universal education (only in terms of number not in terms of quality outcomes) for all.

GER in Primary (age group 6-11 years) – 94.9%

GER in Middle (age group 11-14 years) – 57.8%

Ratio for Girls in Primary- 86% & Middle- 49.6%

Source: Education in India, School Education (Numerical Data) 1999-2000, GoI, Ministry of HRD, Statistics Division, New Delhi.

National Policy on Education, 1986 (Program on Action 1992)

NPE, 1986 beckoned qualitative shift with “Child centered approach” thrust on universal enrolment and retention of children up to the age of 14 years and sustainable improvement in the quality education. Keeping in mind the role of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a support service in universalisation of elementary education (UEE), as well as for human resource development, it was directed to the most underprivileged groups, those who are outside the mainstream of formal education.

NPE document states that between 1950-51 and 1984-85 the number of primary schools increased from approximately 2,10,000 to approximately 5,20,000 and the number of upper primary schools from 30,600 to 1,30,000. Even so, an acceptably large number of habitations are still without primary schools and nearly one-third of the schools in rural areas have only one teacher. The emphasis so far has been on enrolment of children; approximately 95% children in 6-11 age-group and 50% children in 11-14 age-group are enrolled in schools, the corresponding figure for girls being 77% and 36% respectively. However, nearly 60% children drop out between classes I-V and 75% between classes I-VIII. In urban areas there is overcrowding in schools and the condition of buildings, furniture facilities and equipment is unsatisfactory in almost all parts of the country. Rapid expansion, which was not accompanied by sufficient investment of resources, has caused deterioration in academic standards.

The NPE document also spells out failures in UEE as: An analysis of the achievements and failures in UEE shows that we have tended to excessively rely on opening of schools, appointment of teachers and launching of enrolment drives. The above mentioned strategies will make a qualitative change in the implementation of the UEE programme in the coming years. These strategies will, however, succeed only if a genuine mobilization, based on participatory involvement of teachers and the community, can be ensured.

National Education Policy, 2020

The 2020-2030 has been designated as the “decade for action” by the UN. On the front of education, the NEP has significantly contributed to much needed change in India. Many calls to action have been issued in the area of education since the Kasturirangan Committee’s Draft Education Policy was first released in 2019, particularly in the light of the current COVID-19 induced paradigm shift. The implementation of previous policies on education has focused largely on issues of access and equity. The unfinished agenda of the National Policy on Education 1986, modified in 1992 (NPE 1986/92), is appropriately dealt with in this Policy. India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade, and our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country. The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning. Accordingly, the NPE laid emphasis on moving towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new

material in novel and changing fields. Pedagogy to be more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable. The curriculum to include basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners; and make education more well-rounded, useful, and fulfilling to the learner. Education is aimed to build character, enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring, while at the same time prepare them for gainful, fulfilling employment.

NPE adopts a teacher centric approach and calls for recruiting the very best and brightest to the teaching profession at all levels, by ensuring livelihood, respect, dignity, and autonomy, while also instilling in the system basic methods of quality control and accountability. It also focuses on historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups.

The NEP envisages that the extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18. Currently, children in the age group of 3-6 are not covered in the 10+2 structure as Class 1 begins at age 6. In the new 5+3+3+4 structure, a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3 is also included, which is aimed at promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 and its Targets

SDG 4 has 10 targets on different aspects of education out of which 7 are expected outcomes and 3 are means of achieving these targets.

7 Outcome Targets are;

4.1 Universal Primary and Secondary Education.

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

4.2 Early Childhood Development and Universal Pre-primary Education.

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

4.3 Equal access to Technical/Vocational and Higher Education.

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

4.4 Relevant Skills for Decent Work.

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

4.5 Gender Equality and Inclusion.

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 Universal Youth Literacy.

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

4.7 Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

3 means of implementation are;

4.a Effective Learning Environments.

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

4.b Scholarships.

By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, Small Island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries.

4.c Teachers and Educators.

By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and Small Island developing States.

Besides, there are a number of education-related targets and indicators in other SDGs, including health and well-being (Target 3.7), gender equality (Target 5.6), decent work (Target 8.6), responsible consumption and growth (Target 12.8), and climate change mitigation (Target 13.3).

Relevant provisions relating to Primary Education in NEP, 2020 vis-à-vis Goal 4 of SDGs:

SDG 4.1 Universal Primary and Secondary Education- By 2030 all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Both NPE, 1968 and 1986 envisaged free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years. Both the “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009” and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (now the Samagra Shiksha) have made remarkable strides in recent years in attaining near-universal enrolment in elementary education. Chapter 3 of the NEP, 2020 under the heading “Curtailling Dropout Rates and Ensuring Universal Access to Education at All Levels” discusses this issue in detail.

SDG 4.2 Early Childhood Development and Universal Pre-primary Education- aims to ensure by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

Chapter 1 of NEP, 2020 deals with the issue under “Early Childhood Care and Education: The Foundation of Learning” heading.

SDG 4.5 Gender Equality and Inclusion-calls for, by 2030, to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

Chapter 6 of NEP, 2020 – “Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All” relates to this goal. The means of implementation of SDG viz., 4.a Effective Learning Environments and 4.c Teachers and Educators (Chapter 5-Teachers) have adequately been addressed in the NEP, 2020 as is evident from the ensuing discussion.

Fact file of Primary Education status in India: Statistics

Table -1. Adult Literacy Rate (%) (age 15 years and above)

Year	Total	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.3	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.22
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	61	73.4	47.8	25.60
2011	72.99	80.89	64.64	16.25
2022	77.7	84.7	70.30	14.40

Source: <https://dsel.education.gov.in/statistics> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy_in_India

Table -2.Literacy Rates (7+ Age Group upto 15, in %)

	2001			2011		
	Total	SC	ST	Total	SC	ST
Total	64.8	54.7	47.1	73	66.1	59
Male	75.3	66.6	59.2	80.9	75.2	68.5
Female	53.7	41.9	34.8	64.6	56.5	49.4

Source: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-ew/ESG2016.pdf**Table - 3:** Number of Schools (All India)

2006-07		2021-22	
Primary/Pre Basic Schools	60,886	Primary Schools	7,60,460
Primary/Jr. Basic Schools	7,84,852	Upper Primary Schools	4,35,805
Middle/Sr. Basic Schools	3,05,584		
Total	11,51,322		11,96,265

Source: Statistics of School Education SES-School-2006-07 Min. of Education, GoI & (UDISE+) 2021-22 Flash Statistics, Ministry of Education, GoI.

Table - 4: Teachers & PTR (All India)

2006-07		2021-22	
No. of Teachers in Pre Primary/Primary/Jr. Basic Schools	23,23,286	Primary Schools	24,33,800
		Upper Primary Schools (1-8)	24,01,441
		Upper Primary Schools (6-8)	3,50,374
Total	23,23,286		51,85,615
% of trained teachers is 86.		% of trained teachers is; Pre-Primary - 67.6 Primary (1-5) – 88.7 Upper Primary (6-8) - 88.6	
Pupil – Teacher Ratio - 44		Pupil – Teacher Ratio - 28 Classes (1-5) ---26 / Classes (6-8) ---19	

Source: Statistics of School Education SES-School-2006-07 Min. of Education, GoI & (UDISE+) 2021-22 Flash Statistics, Ministry of Education, GoI.

Table – 5: General Enrolment Ratio & Dropout Rates (All India)

2006-07		2021-22	
Classes I-VIII (GER) (6-14 years)	97.08	Elementary	100.13
	Boys 100.43	Primary (GER)	103.39
	Girls 93.47	Upper Primary	94.67
Classes I-V (Drop out)	26.6	Primary	1.45
Classes I-VIII	45.9	Upper Primary	3.02
Out of which rate for SC students are 35.91 and 53.05 and that of ST students are 33.09 and 62.54 respectively.			

Source: Statistics of School Education SES-School-2006-07 Min. of Education, GoI & (UDISE+) 2021-22 Flash Statistics, Ministry of Education, GoI.

Table – 6 : Vital School Infrastructure (in 2021-22, All India) in %

Drinking water within school premises	98.2
Girl's Toilet	97.5
Boy's Toilet	96.2

Electricity	89.3
Hand Wash	93.6
Library/ Reading Room/ Reading Corner	87.3
Play Ground	77
Ramp (with hand rail)	71.8 (49.7)
Functional Desktops/PCs availability	25.9
Functional Laptop/Notebook availability	12.9
Functional Tablets availability	9
Functional Projector availability	16.7
Functional smart class rooms used for teaching with digital board/smart boards/virtual class rooms/smart TV availability	14.9
Mobile phone used for teaching purposes	17.7
Digital Library availability	2.2
Schools created learning outcome based assessment items (Upper primary)	35.2
Schools which have introduced peer learning at	Primary 51.9 Upper Primary 51.8

Source: Statistics of School Education SES-School-2006-07 Min. of Education, GoI & (UDISE+) 2021-22 Flash Statistics, Ministry of Education, GoI.

Findings: Quantitative leapfrog and Qualitative snail pace

Since gaining independence, the primary objective of education policies and efforts in India has been to enhance the availability of educational resources and promote high-quality education. Nevertheless, as seen by the aforementioned discourse, there has been a significant surge of resources over time. However, it is worth noting that the quality of essential resources, as well as the aspects of equity, inclusion, and educational quality, have yet to reach satisfactory levels.

According to the data presented in Table-1, the adult literacy rate has had a significant increase of over four times between the years 1951 and 2011. However, it is worth noting that there remains a persistent gender difference in this aspect, which continues to be a matter of concern. According to Table -2, the presence of deep-rooted social disparities is evident in the relatively lower levels of literacy observed among Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India. According to the data presented in Table 3, there has been a 3.9% (44,943) rise in the number of primary schools during a 15-year period. However, this growth does not align proportionally with the corresponding increase in the number of pupils during the same timeframe. According to the data presented in Table 4, there has been a significant rise of 123% in the number of instructors. Additionally, there has been notable improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR). However, the substandard nature of educational achievements raises scepticism regarding the validity of the data pertaining to qualified educators. The lack of a correlation between enhanced PTR and tangible educational achievements is a notable factor. According to Table 5, there has been a significant decrease in the dropout rate, indicating a higher number of students remaining enrolled in schools. However, it is important to note that this reduction in dropout rate does not necessarily indicate an improvement in the overall quality of education. According to Table 6, there has been significant expansion in traditional and basic school infrastructure. However, the quality of new age infrastructure is lacking. If the latter is not adequately addressed, the domains of equity and inclusion in education will experience significant detriment.

As per ASER-2005:

A. Class VIII students (figures in %)

- 8.72 – can read a Level 1 paragraph
- 85.64 – can read a level 2 story
- 17.78 – can do subtraction

- 69.02 – can do division

B. % of children who cannot read (Age 7-14 All) Level-1 is 34.9% and Level-2 is 51.9% and % of same category of children who cannot solve numerical written sums of subtraction or division is 41% and division is 65.5%.

C. Children never enrolled in the age group of 6-14 is 3.7% and All India % of children out of school is 6.6% which is around 12.6 Million.

D. Std. I –VIII.

- % of schools with no teacher present – 8.4
- % of schools with all teachers present – 36.5
- % of teachers attending school (average) – 74.6

E. Std. I –VIII.

- % of enrolled children attending school (average) – 72.5
- % of schools with less than 50% of enrolled children attending – 14%

As per ASER-2023:

A. % of children not enrolled in schools dropped to 2 or below.

B. Children attendance in school in Grade I –VIII is 71.3 % and that of teachers is 87.5%

C. In 2022 only 1/4th of all children in Grade-III were at “Grade Level” in Maths and about 20% in reading. This means most children need urgent help in acquiring fundamental skills in literacy and numeracy.

D. Grade V: % of children in Govt schools who can at least read at grade II level (all India Rural) is 44.2 (2018) and 38.5 (2022).

Where lie the problems and what are the challenges vis-a-vis quality education:

This paper identified the following major factors which need to be addressed in right earnest to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Also to effectively put to use the available resources/infrastructure so as to derive maximum mileage therefrom that undoubtedly would enable effective implementation of the relevant NEP provisions thereby achieving SDG-4.

1. Lack of qualitatively Trained Educators

The global shortage of highly skilled educators has been highlighted in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Report of 2008. The current shortage of educators in the country has resulted in a situation where a significant number of pupils are being instructed by teachers who do not possess the required subject-matter expertise, training, and instructional skills (Projest, 2013). There exist a multitude of factors that contribute to the dearth of high-quality educators within educational institutions. These factors encompass personal and familial challenges, the allure of pursuing more lucrative employment opportunities, issues pertaining to student discipline, insufficient pedagogical skills, and excessive workloads that impede effective teaching practises. The inclusion of two dedicated chapters (5 and 15) in NEP2020 specifically addressing teachers and teacher education is indicative of the significant attention and significance accorded to this matter. The aforementioned laws shall be executed in both their literal and metaphorical meanings. Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam unequivocally underscored the significance of primary school educators in the development of character and the advancement of the nation. There is a pressing demand for a rebranding of the image of teachers, along with a corresponding increase in remuneration, similar to the practises observed in nations such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands.

2. Poor quality school infrastructure:

The importance of school infrastructure in facilitating the achievement of educational objectives is widely recognised. Consequently, the provision of appropriate amenities and facilities has been prioritised to foster an optimal learning environment. As per the provisions outlined in the Right to Education Act of 2009, it is mandated that every educational institution must possess enough infrastructure. These facilities encompass lavatory facilities, nutritious lunches, drinkable water, and appropriate environmental conditions. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has delineated a comprehensive list of essential infrastructure amenities that are requisite for a school. These are as follows:

The school must have a minimum of two acres of land, with a building built on a portion of that area and a decent playground on the remaining acreage.

A sufficient quantity of books should be available in a well-equipped, roomy library at the school. The student-to-book ratio should remain around 1:5.

The institution must have at least one computer lab with a minimum of ten computers or a computer to student ratio of 1:20 and an internet connection.

For the conduct of various school activities and programmes, the cultural, physical, and moral growth of students, as well as the protection of their health, adequate facilities should be made available for leisure time and physical education.

According to regulations, separate restroom buildings for boys and females will be built. There should be a covered container for sanitary napkin disposal inside each girl's cubicle.

There must be a potable water source on school grounds. For every 100 pupils, there should be a water tank holding no less than 500 liters.

Whether the same has been implemented in toto? a big question. As is seen from the earlier discussion in this regard, infrastructure has definitely improved but when it comes to functionality and usability the picture is dismal. For e.g. In large number of school toilets there is no provision for water; computers and other electronic equipments cannot be used as there is no assured electricity supply etc. Therefore, these edifices more or less remain on the paper as statistics and get destroyed with the ravages of time.

3. Ineffective pedagogies employed:

Effective pedagogy refers to an instructional strategy that prioritises student-centered teaching and learning. Educators who employ this method engage in critical reflection on their theoretical foundations, instructional practises, and policy implementation in order to enhance the learning outcomes of their students. The pedagogical approach employed in primary schools prioritises the cultivation of inquiry-based learning among students. Educators are required to define the learning priorities of their classrooms by utilising questions as a means of guidance and input. The impact of education is further lessened by ineffective pedagogical approaches employed in educational institutions. A number of developing countries continue to employ a pedagogical approach centred around lectures, a practise that often persists from the colonial era and has proven ineffective in promoting progress. Given its widespread application, ease of acquisition, and ability to accommodate large groups, the practise of rote memorization may be deemed advantageous but not preferable within the current milieu of a quickly evolving global landscape. It is important to note that memorization should not be equated with comprehension. While the former may assist students in successfully performing a task, they may have difficulties when attempting to apply their knowledge in practical situations. The primary objective of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is to foster a comprehensive, cohesive, and stimulating approach to curriculum and pedagogy in the context of school-based learning. The intricacies of this matter will be meticulously addressed, with a strict monitoring of the implementation process and regular assessment of progress. Any necessary adjustments will be made accordingly.

4. Over emphasis on universalization of primary education instead of its quality:

The universal entitlement to education is a fundamental human right, necessitating that governments and societies fulfil their obligation to furnish educational opportunities for children upon reaching the age of compulsory schooling. The primary school enrolment in India has been regarded as a noteworthy achievement, mostly attributable to several initiatives and concerted efforts aimed at enhancing enrolment rates. The numerical data provides compelling evidence. This suggests that a significant number of challenges pertaining to educational accessibility have been effectively addressed. Notwithstanding these developments, the rates of student attrition remain elevated, posing challenges in ensuring the retention of children in educational institutions until the completion of their academic programmes. According to available reports, there exists a significant issue pertaining to the attainment of age-appropriate academic standards by children. This predicament raises concerns regarding the overall quality of education. Based on the findings of the Annual Status of Education 2013 study by Pratham, it is evident that a significant proportion of third-grade students, over 78 percent, and fifth-grade students, around 50 percent, continue to have challenges in reading materials appropriate for students in classes II and III, respectively. Concerns regarding mathematics proficiency have been raised due to the fact that just 26% of pupils in Class V demonstrate the ability to successfully answer a division problem. The forthcoming primary objective for both state and central governments will involve enhancing the standard or quality of education in schools, as the progress of these youngsters within the educational system is contingent upon it.

In order to tackle the matter of providing high-quality education, the Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE) convened a meeting in 2016 where various action points were delineated. These action points encompassed the rationalisation of teacher deployment, the establishment of mechanisms to ensure teacher accountability, the consolidation of low enrolment schools, and the utilisation of technology for efficient monitoring, among other measures. In addition to this, the Department of School Education and Niti Aayog, in collaboration with all States and Union Territories, have been collectively working on the development of a School Education Quality Index (SEQI). The purpose of this index is to establish a systematic emphasis on enhancing education outcomes, including learning, access, and equity, as the primary objective of school education policy in India. The launch of this index is scheduled for 2017.

5. Gender parity:

India exhibits a notable disparity in literacy rates between genders. According to the Census conducted in 2011, the male population exhibited an effective literacy rate of 82.14% among individuals aged 7 and above, while the corresponding percentage for females was 65.46%. The presence of educational disparities in a highly stratified culture like India can be observed through various distributions, including but not limited to caste, class, and religion. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to observe that a significant gender disparity in educational attainment continues to exist across all demographic categories. The impediments encountered by women in their educational endeavours should be regarded as an integral element of a broader societal structure that has engendered various systems of gender disparity. There exists a disparity in the expectations placed upon girls compared to boys, with a historical inclination towards prioritising investment in males' education as a means to enhance familial economic and social status. The allocation of scarce resources, including human and financial capital, towards the education of girls is frequently lacking in motivation due to the prevailing perception that the benefits mostly accrue to the household into which she is married. The marriage prospects of highly educated women are accompanied by distinct hurdles, primarily due to the prevalent low levels of education, particularly in rural regions. The presence of multiple factors has contributed to the deep-rooted existence of biases against female education, which is a subject of significant concern.

6. Rural-Urban divide

The limited availability of educational opportunities in rural areas of India is a significant obstacle to the advancement of the nation's economic and social fabric. Based on the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2019 in India, it is revealed that a mere 16% of kids enrolled in Class 1 within the 26 rural districts examined had the ability to read a text at the expected proficiency level. Furthermore, almost 40% of these pupils exhibit an inability to identify letters. The preceding paragraphs provide more information regarding the ASER 2005 and ASER-2023 datasets. In order to achieve the goal of a skilled India, it is imperative to enhance the rural education system. According to a report titled "Education in India" published in 2014, a survey was conducted among around 36,479 rural families and 29,447 urban households. The findings revealed that approximately 67% of rural households and 83% of urban households indicated the presence of upper primary schools within a one-kilometer radius. The lack of resources, inadequate school and infrastructure availability, budgetary limitations, and limited digital literacy hinder children from accessing the desired education. The education of rural children is influenced by gender, as seen by the high dropout rates among girls. Moreover, as a consequence of insufficient support in digital infrastructure, children residing in rural regions of India encountered difficulties in managing their daily educational activities, which were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of the advent of advanced technology, the rise of industrialization, and the growing demand for skilled labour in various sectors, there is an increasingly pressing need to allocate resources towards the education sector in order to shape the future workforce.

7. Financial constraints

The presence of poverty also poses a hindrance to universal access to education. Poverty is frequently cited as a significant determinant influencing students' choice to discontinue their education. Insufficient financial resources, the cost of uniforms, fees, and transportation, as well as the potential loss of labour that children may contribute to their families, result in the depletion of limited resources and subsequently lead to their withdrawal from educational institutions. As per the provisions outlined in the Right to Education Act, private schools and special category schools are mandated to employ a random selection process to allocate 25% of their student body from among the most vulnerable and marginalised segments of society. The state will allocate funds to schools based on the proportion of children enrolled, taking into account the expected cost incurred by the state. Nevertheless, as stipulated in the Right to Education Act, the implementation of the 25% reservation for economically disadvantaged students in private institutions poses significant challenges. According to estimates, over 40% of the population in India resides under conditions of poverty. The presence of child labour serves as an additional obstacle to attaining educational opportunities. Poverty stands as the primary determinant prompting parents to opt for sending their children to work rather than enrolling them in educational institutions. Based on the statistical data provided by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), it is evident that a significant number of youngsters, around 4.5 million, who are of school-going age, are engaged in labour activities to support their own well-being and that of their families, instead of pursuing formal education. The matter at hand exhibits a multifaceted nature.

Conclusion and way forward: Despite the notable advancements made in India's primary education system, there remains a considerable distance to be covered in its progress. The correlation between India's subpar productivity development and the delayed progress of a robust national education system is evident. An unprecedented number of children are being assured access to a higher degree of education. India, however, faces challenges in effectively implementing and monitoring rigorous standards for teaching and learning outcomes across its different regional, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts, hence hindering the achievement of this goal. Furthermore, it is imperative that every child in India receives a comprehensive education in order for the nation to develop into a consumer market that meets global standards. If this issue is not addressed, a significant proportion of the rural population in India will continue to face limited access to credit and largely reside in settings characterised by high levels of debt. The underlying basis of these issues stems from inadequate basic

education, with a portion of this being attributable to deficiencies in secondary and tertiary education. In order to expeditiously initiate reforms in the primary education sector, it is imperative for the government to promptly commence an examination of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) concepts. This will foster an environment that incentivizes the private sector to actively participate, collaborate, and leverage their aggregate expertise. Given the anticipated shift towards technology-driven education delivery in the post-COVID era, substantial expenditures will be required to construct digital infrastructure, including digital classrooms and distant expertise-driven teaching models. Furthermore, the provision of education to pupils on wellbeing and life skills serves to enhance their mental health both presently and in the long term. One of our aims is to minimise human misery. There is a compelling argument for the inclusion of research-based life lessons, such as those pertaining to happiness, resilience, problem-solving, emotional regulation, social interaction, relationship building, personal management, and empathy, inside the curriculum of educational institutions. Children who are raised in this manner exhibit characteristics of resilience, mental well-being, and emotional stability as they transition into adolescence and young adulthood. Therefore, it can be inferred that the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 is a comprehensive and ambitious framework for the Indian education sector, aiming to overhaul the system in order to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively navigate the demands of the contemporary day. If effectively executed, it is expected that this initiative will have significant implications for India's educational system, shaping education policy in the years to come and contributing to the further enhancement of India's global influence.

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