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NEP 2020: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the collaborative endeavour of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) to transform teaching and learning in India by incorporating innovative pedagogies into the curriculum. The NEP 2020 aims to revamp the educational landscape of India and align it with SDG4 "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. This paper revolves around the joint synergy of NEP 2020 and SDG4 to make India a sustainably equitable and vibrant society by ensuring education for all. NEP 2020 is the third educational policy after independence, coming after thirty-four years. It introduces remarkable changes and reforms in India's education system, focusing on accessibility, quality, equity, and inclusivity. The policy has recommended important innovative pedagogical approaches such as art-integrated pedagogy, sports-integrated pedagogy, storytelling, critical pedagogy, etc. in accordance with appropriate age groups. It will help in sensitising learners about issues of sustainability and instil a sense of responsibility towards their planet. The proper implementation of the policy is essential to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 and make India a global superpower.

Keywords: *National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Sustainable Development Goal 4(SDG4)*

Introduction

The world is experiencing various climatic changes such as global warming, the greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, etc., which are detrimental to the living species on the planet. Natural resources, including land, water, forests, and minerals, are getting depleted due to ever - increasing population, urbanisation, industrialization, and globalisation. In such cases, sustainable use of resources becomes necessary to ensure the conservation and preservation of our natural resources and maintain ecological balance. Sustainable development is a comprehensive concept that addresses the needs of the present and future generations by using the available resources judiciously and maintaining ecological balance. Sustainable

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development ensures a balanced and respectful relationship with nature, promoting social and economic well-being and building a better future for all.

Education acts as the primary catalyst and foundation needed to unlock progress across all global sustainability and development targets. Education fosters environmental consciousness by equipping learners with an understanding of critical ecological issues, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion. It instils a sense of responsibility towards the planet, compelling individuals to adopt sustainable behaviour.

"Sustainable development has become a buzzword in contemporary development discourse." (Mensah, J., 2019). Etymologically, the word sustainable development simply means "the development that can be continued either indefinitely or for the given period of time". (Dernbach, 1998, 2003; Lele, 1991; Stoddart, 2011). There are plenty of definitions of sustainable development, but the most cited definition of the concept is proposed by the Brundtland Commission Report, i.e., "Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"(World Commission on Environment and Development Report 1987, ch. 2, p. 37)

The gravity of Sustainable Development is acknowledged globally by world leaders, which sets the stage for the adoption of the 17 Global Goals by the United Nations at the historic summit held in New York on 25th September,2015. These 17 close-knit and interconnected goals were named the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs were adopted to stimulate development actions in areas of critical importance, such as ending poverty, hunger, providing healthy lives and quality education, achieving gender equality, etc., by the year 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4) is a laudable international initiative to ensure accessible, equitable, and high-quality learning opportunities for all. SDG 4—which is envisioned as a component of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—acknowledges education as a key factor in the advancement of sustainability in a number of areas. The objective is to ensure that all people have free access to high-quality primary and secondary education, with a focus on eliminating inequalities based on gender, economic position, and other variables. SDG 4 also broadens its definition to include technical and vocational education with the goal of providing people with the skills required for the rapidly changing labour market. Recognising the role education plays in fostering inclusive and peaceful societies, the agenda underscores the necessity of safe learning.

Sustainable Development Goals reflected in NEP 2020:

As a United Nations endorser, India actively works to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the recently introduced National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) reflects this. NEP 2020 is a progressive policy that aims to rejuvenate India's education system. It integrates and reflects several key Sustainable Development Goals such as SDG4, SDG5, SDG8, SDG10, and SDG 13, but it is primarily anchored in SDG4. (Varadharaj, H., & Prema, M 2023). NEP 2020's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, holistic development, and competency-based learning conforms to the objectives of SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and quality education for all. By prioritizing foundational skills and promoting

innovative pedagogies, NEP 2020 contributes to the achievement of SDG 4 targets, such as improving learning outcomes and enhancing educational access and equity. The reflection of SDG4 in National Education Policy 2020 is as follows:

- **Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education:** SDG4 advocates for the accessibility of free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education to all. The goal is to eliminate disparities based on gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other factors. (Sharma, 24) Para 6.1 of NEP 2020 talks about access to quality school education for all by bridging the social category gap in access, participation, and learning outcomes. In para 14.1, it is mentioned that "making quality higher education opportunities available to all individuals must be among the highest priorities."
- **Ensure Equal Access to Technical and Vocational Education:** The agenda emphasized investing in vocational education and training so that the learners will be equipped with the skills necessary in the workforce. Also, there should be a focus on technical education for all, with a focus on developing relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship. This is in alignment with NEP 2020, as clearly stated in para.16.5.
- **Eliminate Gender Disparities in Education:** SDG 4 aims to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education for vulnerable populations, including girls and women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups. (Kirmani, Sheikh & Ahmad, 2024). NEP 2020 has one of its prime targets to provide equitable education irrespective of gender disparities. The policy constitutes the formation of a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to provide equitable education for girls and transgender individuals. (National Education Policy 2020, para 6.8).
- **Ensure Universal Literacy and Numeracy**: The goal includes targets to ensure that all learners acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with a specific focus on achieving proficiency by the end of primary education. (Sharma, 2024) This goal is an urgent & necessary Prerequisite to learning as described in the policy. (National Education Policy, para 2.2)
- **Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities:** SDG 4 encourages the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for all, recognizing the importance of continuous education and skill development throughout one's life. Para 21.1. of NEP 2020 also puts an emphasis on the fact that literacy and basic education pave the way for personal, civic, economic, and lifelong-learning opportunities for individuals that help them to grow both on personal and professional levels.
- **Build and Upgrade Educational Facilities**: The agenda emphasizes the need to build and upgrade educational facilities that are inclusive, safe, and conducive to effective learning. This involves addressing issues of infrastructure, safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. The Education Policy 2020 has recommended upgrading and enlarging the established government schools by providing effective and sufficient infrastructure to bring back children who had dropped out of school for certain reasons. This will ensure a safe and engaging school education at all levels from pre-primary to Grade 12. (para 3.2, NEP 2020)

Innovative Pedagogies proposed by NEP 2020:

Pedagogy is the art of communicating knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the learners. It determines the learning behaviours and learning outcomes of the learners. So, a pedagogy must be effective and influential and can modify the behaviour of learners in a desired way. According to NEP 2020, curriculum and pedagogies are important cornerstones for quality learning. High-quality pedagogy is then necessary to successfully impart the curricular materials to students; pedagogical practices determine the learning experiences that are provided to the students, thus directly influencing learning outcomes. (National Education Policy 2020, para 12.1). NEP 2020 has spotlighted incorporating novelty in the techniques and strategies of pedagogy in order to make the teaching-learning process more transformative and consequential. "Innovative pedagogical approaches positively impact student learning, behaviour and attitudes and are capable of ensuring that all students achieve the defined course/programme learning outcomes and demonstrate the expected graduate attributes. "National Education Policy 2020, para 13.4). Therefore, the policy underscores flexibility for teachers to adopt innovative pedagogies to ensure a motivated and creative teacher." (Guidelines for Innovative Pedagogical Approaches & Evaluation Reforms, pp.6-7)

The global education development agenda reflected in 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". (National Education Policy 2020). To achieve such an aspiring goal, there is a need for complete reconfiguration of the entire educational landscape that supports and facilitates learning. The ever-progressing employment scenario and global ecosystem demand that children not only learn but, more importantly, learn how to learn. So, NEP 2020 underscores education that is less material-driven, more creative and multidisciplinary. Pedagogies must transform to make learning more dynamic, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery - oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable. The policy has suggested certain innovative pedagogical approaches like experiential learning, flipped classroom, sports integration, art integration, storytelling, etc., in accordance with the appropriate age groups to make the teaching-learning scenario more engaging and holistic.

The important innovative Pedagogies proposed in NEP 2020 are as follows:

i. **Flipped classroom pedagogy:** It is an innovative pedagogical approach based on the constructivist school of thought. It is based on the blended form of learning with an emphasis on 21st-century skills such as Creating, evaluating, and analysing in the form of activity-based learning in the classroom, wherein the interaction between student and teacher takes place in a flexible learning environment and culture.

ii. **Art-Integrated Learning Pedagogy**: It is a joyful and experiential learning pedagogy. It is about identifying the needs and potential of the learners and nurturing them to provide holistic growth. The students actively participate in the process of learning wherein they explore, develop, and express their understanding and creative output using various art forms and make connections across curricula. (NEP 2020, para 4.7)

iii. **Sports-Integrated pedagogy:** It utilizes physical activities, including indigenous sports, in pedagogical practices to help in developing skills such as

collaboration, self- initiative, self- discipline, teamwork, responsibility, etc. (NEP 2020, para 4.8.)

iv. **Critical Pedagogical Approach**: This approach emphasizes enhancing the learners' critical thinking skills by raising questions such as what they are learning and why they are learning, problem posing, and letting the students discover the answers. (NEP 2020, para 4.5)

v. **Storytelling pedagogy:** It is an enjoyable form of teaching used in creating an interactive environment through stories and instances of real-life events to make the process of teaching and learning engaging and interactive. (NEP 2020, para 4.6)

vi. **Fieldwork and outdoor learning**: Fieldwork is an example of experiential learning that can influence students' emotions and help develop the essential critical thinking skills to understand the complexity of an issue. Fieldwork and outdoor learning are often based on issues in the local community and environments, linking theory to real-world examples. (NEP 2020, para 4.26)

vii. **Problem-based learning**: Problem-based learning is an iterative learning process in which students solve open-ended, real-world problems in small collaborative groups. Teachers can use this approach to teach a whole range of subject matter. For example, requires the identification of sustainability-related issues for students to investigate and generate a body of knowledge. Students can develop a vision of alternative actions and potential solutions to the problem, which helps devise a plan of action, followed by a period of reflection and evaluation.

viii. **Brainstorming**: It is a teaching style using a chalkboard or a presentation device to invite ideas from learners on a problem/issue without allowing them to criticise, but encouraging wild ideas, which should follow short-listing and critically analysing the ideas generated. Sometimes, these ideas may be categorised by learners and the teacher together or learners alone to learn _types' or categories' of new concepts.

ix. **Group discussions**: It encourages active listening, self-reflection, and the exchange of different cultural narratives, worldviews, and attitudes, making the teaching-learning process more engaging and collaborative. (NEP 2020, para 11.3)

x. **Role-plays**: This technique provides an opportunity for participants to take on different identities (roles) and act these out with or for others in a scenario depicting some sustainability issues or events so that both participants and spectators can empathize with (put themselves in the shoes of) others and understand their perspective, experiences, and contexts, or issues, better.

Above mentioned pedagogies proposed by NEP 2020 can be served as a tool to sensitize students about the concept of sustainable development since the foundational stage. The vision of the policy, "to transform India into a sustainable, equitable and a vibrant knowledge society" demands an education system that develops a sense of respect and responsibility towards the country's values, culture & traditions. For this, there must be a novel & innovative pedagogy & curriculum which would instil a sense of responsibility among learners towards the preservation of the environment and ecological balance. At the foundational stage, play-based

& activity-based pedagogy will be helpful in developing awareness of conservation and preservation of natural resources such as trees, water, etc. Role-plays will be helpful in depicting sustainable issues through different roles played by the learners, which would help them empathize and understand the perspective of issues. Problem-based pedagogy can be used to instil problem-solving skills and critical thinking in students, through which they will be able to investigate issues such as environmental preservation, sustainability, global warming, etc., and strive for solutions. At the middle & secondary levels, a critical pedagogical approach, cutting-edge pedagogy & group discussions would help sensitize students to different sustainability issues. The main goal of these teaching styles is to connect students to Indian traditions and carve a fair and sustainable future for India.

Conclusion: In a nutshell, the National Education Policy 2020 shares the core vision of SDG 4: using quality education to build a sustainable future. The policy's alignment with SDG 4 aims to foster a collaborative spirit and enthusiasm for a global movement toward inclusive, quality, and equitable education for all. Through NEP 2020, India aims to create young generations equipped with creative potential to deal with complex sustainable issues of the 21st century. Through the harmonious interplay of education and sustainability, India can navigate through the burning problems of the nation and shine as a beacon of progress for generations to come.

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