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The education system in India is transforming itself from focusing on universalisation of access to education to access to quality education, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 in particular). As per the National Sample Survey, the literacy rate of persons of age 7 years and above at the All-India level stood at 77.7 per cent. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by India in 2015– aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030.

India has made remarkable strides in recent years in attaining near-universal enrollment in elementary education through initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (now the Samagra Shiksha) and the Right to Education Act. However, the data for higher grades indicate some serious issues in retaining children in the schooling system. The GER for Grades 6-8 was 90.9%, while for grades 11-12 it was only 56.5%, which indicates that a significant proportion of enrolled students drop out after Grade 8. As per the 75th round household survey by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) in 2017-18, the number of Out Of School Children (OOSC) in the age group of 6 to 17 years is 3.22 crore. In this context, the education policy is attempting to reduce the dropout rate and achieve a 100% GER from preschool to secondary levels by 2030. The futuristic, outcome-oriented New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 stresses upon infrastructure development to ensure participation. The gradual adoption of this policy has thrust upon wide-ranging reforms across the sector.

NEP focuses on reforming and revamping all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education. It is also envisaged to strengthen and expand high-quality institutions. The education system, however, has always been constrained by infrastructure, teachers, technology, policy, budget, etc. The reforms envisaged through the NEP would require a substantial increase in public expenditure on education as well as support through international development agencies, CSRs and CSOs.

Further, it is also proposed to expand and strengthen open schools for meeting the learning needs of the youth of India who are not able to attend a physical school. As per the NEP, in addition to cognitive development, the students also need to be equipped with critical 21st-century skills. Experiential learning methods proposed under the NEP will increasingly be adopted, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, story-telling-based pedagogy, (among others, as the new standard pedagogy within each subject) and include explorations of relations among different subjects. To close the gap in the achievement of learning outcomes, classroom transactions will shift towards competency-based learning and education. Every student will take a fun practical course during Grades 6-8, through which they would be able to sample a hands-on experience of important vocational crafts, such as carpentry, electric work, metalwork, gardening, pottery making, etc.,— decided by States and local communities and as mapped by local skilling needs.

The Policy also aims to provide quality textbooks at the lowest possible cost namely, at the cost of production/printing— in order to mitigate the burden

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of textbook prices on the students and on the educational system. Similarly, to maintain the high quality of education, a National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)– as a standard-setting body under MHRD that fulfills the basic objectives of setting norms, standards, and guidelines for student assessment and evaluation for all recognised school boards of India, guiding the State Achievement Survey (SAS) has also been proposed in NEP.

Apart from the above, NEP aims to establish school complexes/clusters, and the sharing of resources across complexes will have a number of other benefits as a consequence, such as improved support for children with disabilities, more topic-centred clubs, and academic/sports clubs.

In the coming years, there is a pressing need to focus on the digital delivery of education. It is proposed to develop a National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) to support teaching and learning activities including educational

planning, governance, and administrative activities of the Centre and the States/Union Territories. Apart from this, enhancing teachers’ training and introduction of indigenous toy-based learning also need to be prioritised. Considering this new paradigm, the actual budget of Rs 279 crores for Digital India e-learning in the year 2020-21 has been increased to Rs 421 crores in the present budget.

School Education and Literacy

- It is well accepted that the pandemic-induced closure of schools has led to a loss of almost two years of formal education. School children in rural areas, and those from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and other weaker sections, have comparatively been more affected due to lack of quality digital media-enabled learning systems. Hence, the ‘One Class-One Channel’ programme of PM eVIDYA will be expanded from 12 to 200 TV channels and will enable all States to provide supplementary education in regional languages for classes 1-12. High-quality e-content in all spoken languages will be developed

Key Relevant Schemes/Projects to achieve the aims and objectives of New Education Policy (NEP)

ASPIRE (Accelerating State Education Program to Improve Results): ASPIRE, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme supported by Asian Development Bank is proposed to be implemented in five States viz., Gujarat, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand with a total financial support of USD 500 million (3700 crore approx.) over a period of six years.

Exemplar: The Scheme of Exemplar aims to prepare more than 15000 schools of excellence which will help showcase the implementation of the NEP 2020 and emerge as exemplars and schools of excellence over a period of time. They will provide leadership in their respective regions in providing high-quality education in an equitable, inclusive, and joyful school environment that takes care of the diverse background, multilingual needs, and different academic abilities of children and makes them active participants in their own learning process as per the vision of NEP 2020.

New India Literacy Programme (NILP): A new Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Adult Education ‘New India Literacy Programme’ for Financial Years 2022-27 has been designed and developed by aligning with the recommendations on ‘Adult Education and Lifelong Learning’ of NEP 2020.

Operation Digital Board (ODB): The Scheme of ODB provides class-centric digital intervention for teaching and learning and is proposed to be implemented for class IX to XII in all the government and aided schools in the country.

Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN): PM POSHAN earlier known as the National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in Schools is one of the foremost rights-based Centrally Sponsored Schemes under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA). The primary objective of the Scheme is to improve the nutritional status of children studying in classes I-VIII in eligible schools.

Pradhan Mantri Innovative Learning Programme (DHRUV): This Scheme is an initiative to provide guidance from renowned/prominent persons in their field to select talented students.

Samagra Shiksha: The erstwhile Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Strengthening of Teacher Training Institutions have been merged to form the Scheme of Samagra Shiksha. The merger intends to give a holistic and integrated approach to School Education in line with NEP 2020.

Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS): The STARS project seeks to support the States in developing, implementing, evaluating, and improving interventions with direct linkages to improved education outcomes and school to work transition strategies for improved labour market outcomes. The overall focus and components of the STARS project are aligned with the objectives of NEP 2020 pertaining to Quality-Based Learning Outcomes. □

Focused Head of Department of School Education and Literacy	2020-21 (Actual)	2021-22 (Revised)	2022-23 (Budget Estimates)
SSA/ Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	27,835	30,000	37,383
Mid-day Meal Scheme/Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN)	12,878	10,234	10,234
Autonomous Bodies	10,388	11,073	12,359

for delivery via the internet, mobile phones, TV, and radio through Digital Teachers.

- NEP 2020 has emphasised school-level vocational education and within the vocational course, it is desirable to embed crucial critical thinking skills, to give space for creativity. A total of 750 virtual labs in science and mathematics and 75 skilling e-labs are planned to be set up for simulated learning environments.
- In Financial Year 2022-23, the corpus of Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh (PSK) is kept at 10000 crore in the Scheme of PM-POSHAN.
- Under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme, the corpus of PSK and Madhyamik and Uchchar Shiksha Kosh (MUSK), is 28000 crore and 5000 crore respectively.

The revised Budget 2021-22 of the Department of School Education and Literacy is around Rs 51,969 crore. The Union Budget 2022-23 has allocated Rs 63,449 crore to the Department of School Education and Literacy. The table above provides budgets of major heads of the Department of School Education and Literacy across the last three years.

Way Forward

Public spending on education has been in the range of 2-3.5% and continues to be so. The reforms envisaged through NEP would require a substantial increase in public expenditure on education as well as support through CSR activities and CSOs. The impact of Covid-19 on education has been all-encompassing. Most schools were closed since March 2020 and children were being taught online using available assets at home. The importance of access to data networks and electronic devices such as computers, laptops, smartphones, etc., has increased enormously. As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020 Wave-1 (Rural), released in October 2020, the percentage of enrolled children from government and private schools owning a smartphone rose enormously from 36.5% in 2018 to 61.8% in 2020 in rural India¹. If utilised well,

the resultant reduction in the digital divide between rural and urban, gender, age, and income groups is likely to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes. To enable this process, the Government is implementing several initiatives to make education accessible to children during the pandemic. NEP 2020 has focused on learning in the local language; Budget 2022-23 has also recognised this fact and has announced to develop High-quality e-content in all spoken languages.

To maintain the high quality of education, a National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)– as a standard-setting body under MHRD that fulfills the basic objectives of setting norms, standards, and guidelines for student assessment and evaluation for all recognised school boards of India, guiding the State Achievement Survey (SAS) has also been proposed in the NEP.

Apart from the Central Government, State Governments are also incurring expenses in the education sector. A coherent model of synchronisation of funds for the education sector should be developed. The Central Budget may examine the State Governments' budget provisions on education before making budget allocations for the education sector. The priorities of NEP have been considered adequately in the last year as well as in the Budget 2022 by the Central Government's budget and it is desirable that the respective State Governments include budget provisions in a similar, streamlined manner to achieve the aims of NEP-2020. This convergence of State and Central Government funds

and educational schemes would be useful in many ways to achieve the objectives of NEP 2020. The cluster approach for the development of educational infrastructure is already envisaged; in addition to this, it is desirable that the merging of schemes with flexible fund flow mechanisms will bring more effectiveness in fund utilisation in the education sector.

Quality improvement in education is strongly emphasised in the New Education Policy as an essential requirement for building a competitive workforce that is at par with global standards. Accordingly, the flagship policy has included several reforms aligned to this thinking. However, the ultimate implementation aspects of such initiatives will depend on the efforts of the State Governments. In this context, a conditional financing model may be useful to meaningfully incentivise fund utilisation and implementation. □

Reference

1. Economic Survey 2021-22, Govt. of India