



## Critical Analysis of the National Education Policy 2020 and its Vision for Quality School Education in India

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### Abstract

*The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to bring substantial transformation in the school education sector and outlines the key steps needed to achieve the desired improvement. NEP 2020 envisages a more resilient education system that can adequately address disruptions of the kind experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document critically analyses aspects of NEP 2020 relevant to school education, focusing on two dimensions—core visions for school education and the policy mechanisms proposed to realise these visions—and evaluates their implications for quality school education in India. Quality indicators, access to schooling, inclusion of marginalised groups, the equity of access to quality schooling, redress mechanisms, the need for wider pedagogical innovation and system-level assessment reform, and supporting stakeholder roles are identified as priority areas. (Aithal & Aithal, 2019)*

**Keywords:** The National Education Policy (NEP), substantial transformation, school education.

### 1. Introduction

India's National Policy on Education 2020 (Policy 2020) has become the subject of considerable attention from educationists and stakeholders at the national and regional levels. Concurrently, achieving quality school education remains a pressing demand of the education system and a national priority.

The aim of this study is to analyze the critical aspects of Policy 2020 especially its vision for quality school education, and to examine its implications, operational structures and systemic reforms that are prerequisite for ensuring quality in school education. From an analysis of the dysfunctional state of the education system, the dimensions and elements of quality, contemporary international perspectives on quality, and school education's contribution to



overall quality, it emerges that Policy 2020 does not adequately engage such dimensions of quality. Quality and equity are treated as concepts with a shared understanding to supplement the description of a school vision. Quality-related discussions largely remain within existing paradigms, and although the policy is useful conceptually, it has several identifiable gaps and lacks requisite frameworks for its translation into school practice. Consequently, successful implementation is likely to remain elusive (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

## **2. Context and Rationale of the National Education Policy 2020**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 remains a visionary document aimed at extricating the education system and imparting quality education to the students enrolling in the educational system of any realm of education, be it school education or higher education. The NEP 2020 aims to imbue quality education, broader knowledge base, and skills in students enrolling in any realm of education, particularly in school education. The NEP 2020 on school education entails multidimensional facets indicating the extent, magnitude, and significance of the document, particularly for the academic levels, and is followed by a critical dimension of an array of school education facets covered under the NEP 2020 of the Government of India. In India, school education is considered the foremost crucial step required for nation-building as education can play a pivotal role in achieving the objective of nation-building. School education, on the other hand, relies primarily on the quality aspect of education, as quality is a degree or standard of excellence which acts as the basis for any system of education. Further, quality emerges as a priority option in the NEP 2020 policy as well, and imparting quality school education entails covering an array of crucial core dimensions of school education.

Several independent bodies oversaw education in India prior to the country's independence in 1947; since, curriculum and pedagogy planning has remained centralised (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). The Constitution of India, in its 1986 National Policy on Education, emphasised educational reform while reinforcing a national system of education.

## **3. Core Visions for School Education**

Education is an important practice for human development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its vision for quality school education seeks to address the gaps in access and learning. Educational improvement consists of a more flexible curriculum, improved teaching pedagogies, and a sustainable assessment system to monitor the degree of learning at the school stage. India is the fastest-growing economy and simultaneous efforts must be focused towards ensuring that quality education is available at the school stage. Room for improvement also exists in the sector of inclusion, students belonging to marginalized groups and educationally backward areas must be specifically targeted to ensure equal opportunity.

Policy 2020 addresses the issues of school education through its core concepts. Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is given importance since 85% of the brain develops before the age of six. Moreover, Early Childhood Care needs to be included in the formal education sectors and "National ECCE policy" must be established to define the roles of stakeholders in the private and



government sectors. Well-managed ECCE activities can increase enrollment from Primary to Secondary schooling by 40%, and Primary to Higher Secondary by 50% (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Quality improvement must aim to strengthen institutions and human resources alongside infrastructure development, provide adequate books and digital resources, maintain approachable teacher-student ratios and effective Teacher Development Program (TDP) (Bajaj, 2014). Improved teaching arrangements such as Project Based Learning, Multi-sensory Education, Integrated Education, and Dual-Environment Learning should be emphasized. Assessment mandates the revision of test systems standardization and inception of scientific methods to evaluate and supplement test scores.

Recognition of gaps in physical, digital and social access and unlocking of barriers and restrictions for educational support are key for bringing all students up to the required level of learning. An overall policy framework for ensuring that no learners are left behind must allow for flexible local initiatives by students, schools, and local stakeholders.

### **3.1. Foundational Stage and Early Learning**

The Foundational Stage of education for children aged 3–8 (pre-school and Grades 1 and 2), is determined as the most critical in a child's development. At this stage, child development unfolds rapidly across motor, language, self-regulation and socioemotional, and cognitive domains, in which children go through varied phases of readiness and competence. Presently, a mismatch exists between provisions for child care and education during this age group in India, causing under-utilisation of the child's growth potential (Fatima Shirly Anitha & Narasimhan, 2021). Until the Foundational Stage is better recognised and adequately addressed, the Policy vision for quality school education may not be realised.

Like the Foundational Stage for learners aged 3–8, the following Preparatory Stage for learners aged 8–11 (Grade 3 to 5) and the subsequent Stage for ages 11–14 (Grades 6–8) are also crucial to indicator 1.2, those on improving physical and psychosocial environments at school and empowering learners through content that fosters physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The Preparatory Stage consolidates the earlier holistic approach to early childhood learning and seamlessly transitions learners into formal learning at the Upper Primary Stage (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

### **3.2. Access, Equity, and Inclusion**

The National Education Policy (NEP)–2020 aims to emphasize access, equity and inclusion as essential aspects of quality school education in India (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). To achieve universal access to school education at all stages, the framework proposes the following interventions: several additional schools will be opened and the existing intake capacity in the areas underserved will be enhanced to ensure adequate and equitable availability of schools within easy reach; transport facilities will be provided in areas with difficult terrain; education will be made accessible for step-by-step learning and skill development, in particular for youth who are on the margins; guidelines will be developed and support will be provided for state-level planning



to develop innovative integrated schemes into a comprehensive off-line (mixed mode) programme for out-of-school children; a mechanism for tracking of dropped-out students and out-of-school children will be developed; instructional material in regional language will be made available; and innovative technology will be used to assess and strengthen the performance of school education in the state.

The NEP recognizes the socio-educational challenges that limit access to quality education for the most marginalized. Targeted efforts will be made to provide quality education to the National Hostels in Tribal Area, the National Institute of Open Schooling and other present (formal and non-formal) education system for Drop-out, Adult Education, Literacy and diverse Non-formal Education in respect of Aided and Unaided institutional, Residential Schools, ITIs, Polytechnics and other Sectors of Education. To improve equity in both access and learning outcomes of sub-groups such as Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups, Gender Gaps, Performance Gaps in different Domains and different Class Levels, the NEP advocates for a continual monitoring, accurate study and research, and targeted intervention that pays particular attention to certain sub-groups' specific barriers.

Uniformly minimum standards for safety, hygiene, and maintenance will be established for all educational institutions to promote the safety and security of students and encourage parents from all sections of the society—even those in the informal sector enabling them to send their girl children to schools with confidence. Systems will be put in place to regularly monitor the adherence to such uniform standards and to penalize deviations. All the schools will function in conformity with the comprehensive school safety framework laid down and already being implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India to ensure to comply with the safe environment norms at their school premises.

### **3.3. Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment**

Education is vitally important for every nation in the world. Narendra Modi, the Honourable Prime Minister of India, in his recent address to the nation outlined the importance of Education and stated that “Education is the need of the hour and it plays a very important role in the development of a Nation”. He stated the fact that “Only through education one’s character, caliber and bread will be set right”.

Education is the only weapon which empowers the weaker section of the society to reckon with the educated class. Education does not merely impart knowledge but it also is a way of life. Education helps to shape an overall personality of an individual. Education is the only means to achieve success and prosperity in the life. With the changing trends and diversities in the Education System, the present curriculum and pedagogy needs to undergo a drastic change.

The world is in the phase of rapid changes in all the fields and Indian Education System is on the way of developing the Rural and Urban standard of Education. Education definitely is a vehicle of Progress and Transformations and in the Indian Context, NEP 2020 aims to change the



Education System and to transform the Education in the Nation. The revisions in the Curriculum and Pedagogy gives a shining rays for the future of Education in India.

### **3.4. Teacher Education and Professional Development**

The effective use of technology for teaching has become essential, especially after the pandemic. Technology may be used as an enabler of quality educational reforms as suggested by the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020). Schools can use simple open-source applications like WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Classroom, etc. and homemade low-cost teaching aids. Conceptual understanding of core subjects may be reinforced with creative activities. Hybrid learning models may be adopted for students without digital access. As per National Council of Educational Research and Training – UNESCO guidelines, “Wherever schools reopen, and education is resumed, by using a large number of simple low-cost educational materials, central points on how to impart education with reduced class time, how to course-correct childhood education and bridge learning gaps.” (Aithal & Aithal, 2019)

### **3.5. Governance, Monitoring, and Accountability**

Education has always been a matter of national concern and policy. A most progressive National education policy is imperative for the development of the nation. It facilitates the change to a progressive society, a society to reap full economic benefits, along with social and spiritual “Progress.” Indian government is serious and touchy about education. Education helps to manage and guide the nation towards its goal. New education policy plays a vital role for renewing and nourishing education. Emphasis is made to deliver education policy manifesting the thoughts, perspectives and believes of prominent leaders like Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

## **4. Critical Evaluation of Policy Mechanisms**

Policy 2020 envisions school education as a comprehensive holistic development of the child spanning the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Education of all learners, irrespective of their demographic background, is key to achieving socio-economic developmental goals and transforming India into a \$5 trillion economy. Various empowering policies, schemes, concepts, norms, and structures have been formulated over the years. However, the desired quality in school education remains elusive (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). In India, Pre-Primary education, Primary education, and Secondary education are under the Department of School Education and Literacy. School education is provided until the secondary stage and extends to the school stage in the National Policy on Education, 1986 which was revised in 1992. The section describes the crucial policy interventions, strategies, and mechanisms that address the quality of school education, that the policy 2020 seeks to address, follows a holistic approach.

Foundational literacy and numeracy has been proposed as an urgent national mission. The new curricular structure proposed by the policy 2020 lays down the school curriculum in five stages. Only the different terminology is used, the classes of the schools covered under the Foundational Stage remain the same before and after policy 2020. The policy 2020 proposes flexibility in Subject Selection at school level and with its proper implementation there is high feasibility that



the underprivileged students can select subjects of their own interest. Nonetheless, it is a concern that flexibility in Subject Selection is permitted only at +2 level and continuation of rigidity at junior secondary level from 8th to 10th is reflected.

#### **4.1. Structural Reforms and Institutional Arrangements**

There is a need to, through structural reforms and institutional arrangements, strengthen the foundational aspects of school education as well as make improvements in other phases of school education instead of solely focusing on secondary and higher education. The ambitious target of the National Education Policy (NEP) to achieve †universalization of school education is expected to be accompanied by institutional arrangements for regulated quality of school education at all levels (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Compulsory primary education legally enforceable for children up to the age group of fourteen years is already in place since 1956 during the First Five Year Plan. No Act constitutes compulsory education for children beyond fourteen years for the \*ninth standard+one/higher secondary stage. Availability of school education up to +one/ higher secondary stage is a prerequisite for \*school universalization. The operational definition of universalization remains yet to be clearly and explicitly defined in the NEP. The immediate requirement for further perspective through the prism of foundational education, keeping in mind the NEP's target of improving the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of school education which is a prevailing myth yet to discuss is school road mapping & universalization involving broader contemplated high level multi locational institutional arrangements convenient prickly discerning structural reforms focusing on incremental quality strengthening governance monitoring administrative concern and consideration. The pace & space foundation of education & early learning out-come based schooling introduces onto long awaited area. A strengthened foundational and early learning stage emphasis is to provide then restorative corrective importance yet needed repeater broadened defined quality school education. The need for structural reform getting both the Government inter-departmental attention for school subject schooling and structural education duly placed under both centrally and state fund of the Education.

#### **4.2. Funding and Resource Allocation**

India spends 3.84-4.23% of its GDP on education. The main obstacle towards achieving Quality school education as per National Education Policy 2020 is Funding and Resource Allocation. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), a programme to enhance access to and quality of secondary education requires 50% Budget under RMSA for School Education Level II. It is also expected that 20% of school funds be allocated for Teaching Learning Material under RMSA scheme (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

#### **4.3. Implementation Challenges at the School Level**

As the existing quality of primary and secondary education in India remains inadequate (Bajaj, 2014) , Policy 2020 aims to improve these sectors through a variety of reforms and programs. Vision elements such as a coherent curricular structure, multilingual instruction from an early



stage, improved pedagogy based on local contexts, and methodologies that encourage dialogue with teaching material, rather than rote memorization, represent pedagogical and educational improvements embedded within Policy 2020. The Policy's vision for better quality at the school level is further articulated through the tools of national achievement surveys, a state assessment index for school education, boards of secondary education, philanthropy and grant-giving, and newly proposed school-based assessment approaches. Policy elements such as school improvement plans, training and material provision for teachers and heads of schools, standardization of objectives for curricular materials in light of National Curriculum Framework recommendations, state and district educational plans, and holding local consultations on matters such as teacher recruitment processes, are presented as being directed towards the extension of the school improvement process.

While Policy 2020 introduces significant changes that complement and further support the Government of India's ongoing efforts to address the school quality challenge, similar challenges and questions remain. Policy initiatives and research related to the education quality situation scout further areas of attention that bear directly upon the scope and successful application of Policy 2020. Such challenges are detailed in subsequent sections under the themes of governance fragmentation, school-centricity, and spatial disparities relevant at the school level. The emphasis in Policy 2020 on curricular freedom, locally relevant material, and room to define the curriculum remains critical in light of reports indicating serious deficiencies in the effective and imaginative implementation of earlier curricular materials, recommendations, and the concurrent intense centralization of education in some states.

#### **4.4. Stakeholder Roles: Governments, Schools, and Communities**

The design and successful implementation of education policies depend upon the participation of multiple stakeholders. Understanding the roles of governments, communities, and other stakeholders is crucial for framing policies, determining institutional arrangements, sequencing reforms, and identifying champions for key elements. Addressing stakeholder roles contributes to understanding structural, funding, and implementation aspects of the National Education Policy 2020.

The State and Central Governments have primary responsibility for education, but numerous other stakeholders influence policy and practice. For school education, these include National and State Commissions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Office of the Special Advisor on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and civil society groups representing different interest groups. The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) established the Right to Education as a fundamental right, making it the responsibility of the State and Central Governments to provide for this right through legislative action, according to the 2009 modification of the Constitution and the 2009 Act (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Supreme Court pronouncements on the 86th Constitutional Amendment also acknowledge that those who influence schooling have a legitimate role in policy formulation (Bajaj, 2014).



Governments and communities operate at different levels. Earlier policies considered schooling a “service” provided by the State, marginalizing the involvement of parents and citizens. National Education Policy 2020 restores the possibility of initiating reform from the community level and recognizes the importance of their participation (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Societal involvement not only helps reach marginalized groups but also expands the ambit of actual reform through the participation of diverse providers, such as non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, trusts, and private providers.

## **5. Implications for Quality School Education**

Educational policies in India since independence have pursued universal access to learning opportunities. However, the education system still struggles to promote widespread access and equality, especially at the school level (Bajaj, 2014). According to the 2015–16 Household Survey of Educational Statistics, about 23% of rural areas remain unserved by schools, and 33% of students aged 6–14 live outside the catchment area of a school. Nearly 55% of children aged 0–6 do not receive early childhood education. The Right to Education Act 2009 also mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 (14 years before 2020), yet 1.8 million children drop out before age 14 (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

To avoid continued geographic and social inequity in education, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) recommends restructuring from the earlier 10+2 to a new 5+3+3+4 system of school education. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further underscore the need to reach all children and ensure minimum learning outcomes. The Committee on National Education Policy 2019 noted the drastic loss of learning and recommended a set of immediate and medium-term measures. NEP 2020 builds on the earlier proposals and provides details of the vision. Nevertheless, several gaps and limitations still merit research attention and action.

Quality remains a key issue to achieve the NEP vision. The growing articulation of a quality problem in participation, process inputs, outcomes, and exit indicators points to the multifaceted nature of this problem. At the foundational stage, the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy proposes a quality framework for education in pre-school and early childhood settings. NEP 2020 recommends defining learning outcomes to address the foundational stage of school education as well. Quality in school education, however, continues to be largely unspecified. The absence of a self-contained yet comprehensive formulation and the inadequacy of the major National Programme for Action after 1994 persists in further deterring action. Because NEP 2020 still operates within the same school educational structure, it will need to overcome similar challenges and lay down comprehensive and implementable solutions.

### **5.1. Quality Indicators and Benchmarks**

Quality is the key concern in all education policies—whether the focus is on access, equity, or inclusion, it is not possible to think of these goals without quality (Bajaj, 2014). A considerable body of work on the quality parameters for school education has emerged during the last two decades, even though no universally accepted definition of the term exists (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).



The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mentions equal educational opportunities for all sections of a society, particularly the underprivileged and marginalized, as the first guiding principle (i.e., “access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability.”) and outlines particulars related to the three guiding principles. However, it does not cover details about the parameters for quality, leaving them implicit by pointing to the earlier works. The Constitution of India underscores the right to equality as the fundamental principle of democracy; out of 22 fundamental rights, Articles 14–32 cover equality (which includes affirmative action for SC/ST). Access is not quality. Only the existence of school does not guarantee quality education, more so in the context of India, where quality remains a matter of concern in multiple dimensions (i.e., infrastructure, academic, teaching, learning, citizenship, and even digital literacy). The NEP provides much leverage at the apex level, concentrating on architecture and structure, which is a vital aspect for operationalizing all other aspects—despite it being enhancement rather than sustenance. The Jyotirao Phule, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, and Basaveshwara ideologies highlighted the need to “develop the whole man” by establishing schools and colleges; the quality parameters fall beneath the content of this sentence. Quality requires full system-wide enrichment, across a much broader horizon; this requires radical transformation along the same lines as provided.

According to the Dalit perspective, inclusion is to be “allowed into a general discourse which fundamentally remains exclusionary”. However, the NEP proposes to bring all such excluded marginalized groups within a larger discourse, instead of creating a separate quality parameter that would permit them to conceive a different mindset based entirely on the merit. In the face of exclusion, permitting recurrence of integration would only further aggravate the very fact of exclusion. Quality is probably too far-fetched a subject beyond both time within the NEPA and the complete education system is adequately ready to apply the desired quality.

## **5.2. Inclusion of Marginalized Groups**

The National Education Policy 2020 (Policy 2020) envisions a more holistic integrated approach in providing students an opportunity in multi-disciplinary streams from the early years. School education is planned in three tiers of Foundational Stage, Preparatory Stage, and Secondary Stage, the Foundational Stage focusing on Early Childhood Care and Education, and bridging the learning gap. Learning concerns regarding Pre-Primary children and children going to School without ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) are articulated through National Achievement Survey (NAS) – 2021. The initiative of School Preparedness Programme (SPP) for children coming to School without ECCE is being implemented to address the challenge of transition from Pre-Primary to Grade I and also to overcome the emerging concern of foundational learning and learning gaps. The Need and advocacy for bringing ECCE with school education has been emphasized through several committees and committees from time to time. The foundational stage of education is a crucial phase to provide a strong base for students. The very first exposure of children to organized schooling is taking place in this stage. Due to this, several



recommendations to ensure that all children receive quality education at the foundational stage have been framed. A set of National Curriculum Framework in Early Childhood Care & Education (NCECE), guidelines on school preparedness programme, and National Learning Framework is prepared to nurture and promote the development of a child holistically in terms of Health, Hygiene & Nutrition (Physical), Social & Emotional Development (Soci-Emotional), Play & Exploration (Cognitive), Language (Linguistic Development) and Art & Craft (Artistic Development). National Curriculum Framework (NCF) – 2005 has also underlined the importance of Foundational Learning. It is projected that the Children's ability in Listening (Aithal & Aithal, 2019) , Speaking, Reading, and Writing failed to achieve the expected levels in Grade III during both National Achievement Survey (NAS) – 2017 (Baseline) and NAS 2021 (Midline) the same has also been reflected in National Education Policy (NEP) – 2020. MCETY recommends the provision of a play-based approach in Pre-Primary instruction to facilitate the holistic development of the child and lays emphasis on the use of Mother tongue/Regional Language in Pre-Primary instruction. States have highlighted the strategy for promoting Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in the stage of pre-Primary (F1-F2) through structured play based and developmentally appropriate learning activities.

Policies are required at Multi-dimensional aspect to address the expected quality of school education and to lay a strong foundation in the education system.

### **5.3. Equity of Access and Redress Mechanisms**

Government schools in the country have been failing in their efforts to provide good quality education to students enrolled in such schools, especially after the implementation of the Right to Education Act in 2009. Consequently, many parents have been preferring low-fee private schools for their children, which does not conform to the norm of equal access to quality education despite being in a low-fee school. According to a rapid survey conducted at the end of 2012 by the National Institute of Open Schooling (Srivastava & Noronha, 2013) , families belonging to economically weaker and lower caste sections were still finding it difficult to access and enter the low-fee private sector. The data collected during the survey also revealed that 16.8 per cent of families were still unable to pay even a nominal fee. The survey highlighted that exclusion is not only based on affordability but also based on access to information, locations, and varying levels of quality. The study indicates that many households were still unaware of the availability of low-fee private schools in their vicinity or lacked the necessary information to access these private schools. Furthermore, the conclusive statement was made that low-fee does not imply affordability and education as a commodity does not mean free, given that parallel governmental systems of high quality are still required to accomplish 100 per cent enrolment. The study further emphasized that poor and marginalized sections of society did strongly aspire for a national norm of acceptable quality schooling and education, which still does not exist and remains a significant challenge, with the emergence of several different markers of quality added to quality. Around 43 per cent of low-fee private schooling still offered an inferior quality of



schooling when compared with government school status. Examining the low-fee case further reflects on policy and decision-makers to ponder and introspect about the recent recurrent considerations and issues that have emerged during the process of implementation of the Right to Education Act. High- and low-fee private schooling does play a role in determining certain markers of quality in education, given that the desired level of quality schooling in the present era is still not met, which is not only a concern for quality education but also a concern for equity in education. Hence, it may be assumed that policy with respect to equity and low-cost education has been derailed from the original perspective and provided a different dimension altogether to analysis, discussion, and debate.

#### **5.4. Pedagogical Innovation and Assessment Reform**

The NEP has envisaged a national education system that contributes directly to transforming India into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, and to attaining the goal of a sustainable, inclusive, and just society. The success of the NEP depends tremendously on how quality is defined and what indicators and benchmarks are set for measuring it.

Quality of education refers to the transmission of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to achieve their fullest potential. Quality in school education is more clearly defined as an acceptable level of achievement or performance in certain indicators. Thus, some benchmarks for measuring school education quality are (i) completion of basic schooling (up to grade 8) within the stipulated time frame; (ii) average performance of students in national/state level standard tests; and (iii) school infrastructure, physical and sanitary facilities, teaching aids, teacher availability vs. sanctioned posts, teacher attendance and regularity of classes, and average attendance of students in classes. Several national assessments have indicated that the quality of school education provided is not acceptable, as many students even in grade 5 are unable to read a simple text fluently in the language of instruction used or faced difficulties in solving simple arithmetic problems (Bajaj, 2014). The NEP has rightly envisaged a national education system that nurtures the innate abilities and holds the potential of the individual to provide age-appropriate exposure to education.

#### **6. Critical Gaps and Areas for Further Research**

Policy 2020 proposes a single-sector Ministry of Education, strengthening the curriculum framework and pedagogical structures for holistic learning, addressing mental health and emotional well-being through the National Educator Support System, and improving internship and hand-holding opportunities along with recognition of pre-service training under the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme. It recommends assessment reform for learner-centric education, National Assessment Centre to monitor learning outcomes and improve pedagogy, and integration of National Skills Qualifications Framework in curricula.

The Policy does not explicitly indicate focus on, national benchmarks for nor strategies to enhance quality, equity, and inclusion in school education (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Three National Education Policy sites evaluate implications for quality, examining indicators, inclusion of



marginalized groups, equity of access and redress mechanisms, and pedagogical innovation and assessment reform.

## 7. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 (hereafter 'Policy 2020') envisions a transformative change in India's educational landscape to make the nation a global knowledge superpower. The first education policy, established in 1968 and revised in 1986 and 1992, reflects the significance of education in the country's socioeconomic development, including the commitment to provide quality universal education, eradicate illiteracy, and eliminate disparities among different sections of society. Preliminary measures have already been taken to address these aspects through various programmes and initiatives. Nevertheless, gaps remain to be filled to make education accessible to every child.

According to data collected by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration in 2015, about 7 million children aged 6–14 years remain out of school, which constitutes 1 in every 31 children in this age group. Of those enrolled, 56% of students drop out before completion of Class 8 (Bajaj, 2014). Additionally, children from deprived sections, including girls and underprivileged castes such as SC, ST, and OBC groups, tend to suffer from issues of access, equity, and quality. The ultimate goal of Policy 2020 thus remains to provide quality education to every child in the country.

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