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## Transforming Right To Education For All Into A Reality: The Way Forward

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**Abstract:** Education is a fundamental right, a stepping stone towards a brighter future. In India, the Right to Education Act (RTE), enacted in 2009, stands as a beacon of hope, promising quality education for every child. It's not just a law; it's a lifeline that connects the dreams of millions of children to the reality of classrooms. Every child must have an access to quality education, regardless of their, background, economic status, or location. The RTE Act aims to transform this vision into reality. The Right to Education Act, implemented in 2010, marked a paradigm shift. Statistics indicate a substantial increase in enrollment rates post-RTE. In 2005-06, the gross enrollment rate was 96.7%, while in 2016-17, it rose to 99.2% showcasing the impact of this legislation. The Economic survey 2022-23 states that the Quality Education which is enlisted as Goal 4 under UN SDGs (SDG4) aims to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. It is in this context that the National Education Policy 2020 was laid down as the *1<sup>st</sup> Education Policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, aiming to address the many growing developmental imperatives of the country. The policy provided for the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure.

Like the pathway linking NEP to NIPUN in early grades, similar efforts are needed for translating middle school and secondary school reform ideas into action. Close tracking of outcomes will be key to improvements and eventual success. For secondary school age students, NEP 2020's perspective on "learning for work" is largely dependent on a "complete re-imagination" of how vocational education is offered to students in the future.<sup>16</sup> Changing perceptions and practices with respect to vocational skilling will be key to the transformation that is required. One of the consequences of universal elementary education is that it raises student and family aspirations for an academic pathway leading to white collar jobs. Not only does this lead to cutthroat competition for getting into colleges, but it also closes young minds to the possibility of exploring other livelihood pathways for progress. The responsibility for creating a new highway for transition from school to work lies not only on the education system but also with industry. Developing a variety of effective paths to help young people find productive livelihoods so that they can live fruitful lives is one of the major challenges facing India today.

**Key Words-** Education, Enrollment Ratio, RTE- 2009, NEP, NIPUN, UDISE, ASER

**I. Introduction :-** Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It develops confidence and helps in building the personality. School education plays a major role in everyone's life, among that primary education is most important because it prepares the base which helps throughout the life.

In the past two decades, schooling and basic learning (or foundational literacy-numeracy as it is now called) have been at the top of educational debates - discussions in India. These deliberations have certainly influenced significant shifts in policies and priorities in recent times. At least 15 years ago, the Right to Education (RTE) Act became a law; it gave legislative backing to the goal of universal elementary schooling. The new National Education Policy (NEP) was launched in 2020 which takes a more comprehensive view on

how to provide quality education for the entire age range in order to strengthen our education system and prepare well for the future.

As is well known, the Right to Education law is applicable up to age 14 or Std. VIII – the end of the elementary school stage. At the other end of the age range, to be employed full time in the formal sector, you need to be at least eighteen years old. With its focus on adolescents, does ASER 2023 bring any new inputs or insights into the current thinking for what more can be done for and by young people in India?

**II. School scenario:** - Available data points to the fact that for the elementary school age population, enrollment levels are close to being universal (ASER 2022, UDISE). Data from 2005- 2006 shows India's enrollment in Std. VIII to be a little over 11 million. By 2020-21, this number had reached over 22 million (UDISE). Transition rate from elementary school (Std. VIII) to secondary school (Std. IX) also is high at 88.81% nationally (UDISE). ASER 2024 report indicates that both teacher and student attendance in government elementary schools has increased. Average student attendance increased from 72.4% in 2018 to 75.9% in 2024. Average teacher attendance increased from 85.1% in 2018 to 87.5% in 2024.

In short, today more children in India have more years of schooling than ever before. The proportion of children who are "underage" (age 5 or below) in Std. I is decreasing over time. The survey shows a decline in the percentage of underage children in Std. I, with the lowest ever at 16.7% nationally in 2024.

Universal secondary enrollment is a national goal. The recent ASER 2023 data shows that in the sampled rural districts, more than 85% of youth (age 14-18) are currently enrolled in some kind of educational institution. On the other hand, this trend is accompanied by rising pressures on individuals and institutions. ASER 2022 data showed that more than 80% of mothers and fathers of students enrolled in Std. VIII in 2022 had less than 10 years of school (half of mothers and a fourth of fathers of Std. VIII children had no schooling). It is very likely that such parents aspire for a future for their children that they themselves could not have. These aspirations translate into acute academic competition, widespread coaching, heavy expenditure by families. All of these add to examination pressures often accompanied by severe disappointments for the student and the family, if exam results are poor.

### **III. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN): -**

Trends on basic learning have remained relatively unchanged over the last decade. Although the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and ASER use different metrics and methods for assessing learning, both point to the fact that basic learning levels of elementary school children need significant improvement. NEP 2020 also clearly states the urgent need for ensuring that by Std. III, children have acquired basic reading and arithmetic skills. NIPUN Bharat is the government's operational plan for implementation of programs for achieving this goal. For Std. I and II, in most states, energetic and focused action is currently visible under NIPUN Bharat. The combination of the launch of NEP 2020 and schools opening after a long period after the pandemic has led to early grades getting much needed and focused attention.

But what about the middle school children in the last few years? These are the students who are in secondary school today. ASER 2023 data from the sampled districts is an extension of these trends. 45% of youth in the age group 14-18 have basic arithmetic proficiency. The rest need to "catch up". Low levels of foundational numeracy affect the ability of youth in tackling everyday calculations where they need to apply measurement or use the unitary method in practical situations, or even do simple financial computations.

ASER 2023 data provides several examples of how youth who lack basic arithmetic skills struggle to do everyday calculations. Data from ASER 2023 indicates that building foundational literacy and numeracy may be needed for about a fourth of youth in the 14-18 age group. NEP 2020 recognizes the need for "catch up" in the case of those who have fallen behind. Thus, programs could be put in place, if they do not already exist, to help students from Std. VIII and higher grades who are lagging behind academically.

### **IV. Digital access cum possibilities in futurity: -**

Future world will be of techno friendly. There are many areas of life on how different facets of technological change and digital advances will affect our lives in the future. At least in terms of access and connectivity, ASER data provides several clear trends. Smartphones have penetrated swiftly into the necessity in India. During the ASER 2023 survey, in sampled rural districts, close to 90% of the 14-18 age group reported having a smartphone at home and more than 90% reported being able to use such a device. During the household survey, at very short notice, when the adolescent being surveyed was asked to bring a smartphone to do digital tasks, 67% could do so without much difficulty. Youth have access to smartphones and know how to use them. Connectivity is available for the most part even in most interior villages.

To build better digital capability on scale for using digital resources for variety of purposes, the schools should add digital skills as one of the necessary component of personality development. NEP 2020 strongly

recommends leveraging technology to improve educational processes and outcomes by promoting digital literacy and tech-based initiatives.

### **V. Vocation with Learning: -**

Exploring youth aspirations is a much harder task than tracking enrollment or learning. Still ASER 2023 offer some insights. First, most students want to study more. More than half of those not currently enrolled also want to study further. At least a Bachelor's degree if not more seems to be the aspiration of majority of young people in this age group. For a variety of reasons, many are already working, even while they are enrolled. Among males, a third of those in Std. X or below, 40% of those in Std. XI and XII, and close to 50% of those currently studying beyond Std. XII are working alongside their studies (and figures for females are lower, perhaps due to higher work participation in the home). Among males who are still in secondary or higher secondary grades and are working alongside, more than 80% work in family farms or other family enterprises. Second, vocational skilling is not the first choice for youth. The data for this age group shows that less than 6% are currently doing vocational courses.

For example, the system of community colleges in the United States caters to young people who need to work but also want to study. NEP 2020 focused to "re-imagine vocational education" and recommends "integration of vocational education programs into mainstream education in all education institutions in a phased manner". We should think on that housework have to simply be chores or can these be seen as different kinds of projects linked as part of the curriculum.

### **VI. Way forward: -**

Education policies in the decade 2010 to 2020 have helped in setting priorities for the India. NEP 2020 has been shaped by learning from the past, by absorbing from the present recent experience and also by imagining the future will be like. For the next decade and more, this policy can provide direction on how we as a country need to prepare for the future. Along with RTE becoming a law in 2009, India's school enrollment rates have stayed close to universal levels in elementary school, despite school closures and disruptions due to the pandemic. In fact, the priority of "schooling for all" has pushed enrollment levels at high level beyond the mandated compulsory stage. NEP 2020 has re-imagined the "foundation stage" (age 3 to age 8). The government's NIPUN Bharat mission has begun to restructures the practices. Some of these changes are already visible on the ground. Across school education, a variety of initiatives are taking off that include "catch up" efforts for basic learning, streamlining and building up assessment mechanisms at state and central levels. NEP 2020 also visualizes a renovate of curriculum content at the secondary stage to bring in "greater depth, in critical thinking, attention to life aspirations and greater flexibility and student choice of subjects". Like the pathway linking NEP to NIPUN in early grades, similar efforts are needed for translating middle school and secondary school reform ideas into action. Follow up and tracking of outcomes will be key to improvements and eventual success.

For secondary school age students, NEP 2020's perspective on "learning for work" is largely dependent on a "complete re-imagination" of how vocational education is offered to students in the future. Changing perceptions and practices with respect to vocational skilling will be key to the transformation that is required. One of the consequences of universal elementary education is that it raises family and children aspirations for an academic pathway leading to white collar jobs. Not only does this lead to cutthroat competition for getting entry into colleges, but it also closes young minds to the possibility of exploring other livelihood pathways for progress. The responsibility for creating a new highway for transition from school to work lies on the education system as well as with industry. Creating a variety of highways and pathways to help younger one find productive livelihoods for the positive, productive and fruitful lives is a major challenge India is facing today.

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