

## National Education Policy 2020: Implication on Mental Health of Students and Teachers

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### Abstract

National Education Policy 2020, as we know was declared on July 29, 2020 by the Central Government after an approval by the Union Cabinet. Notwithstanding the undemocratic character of the process of this policy making. The policy claimed to revitalize all and sundry aspects of education. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the implication of DNEP 2020 on mental health of the students and teachers in the light of various provisions related to foundational literacy and numeracy, curriculum and pedagogy and term and conditions related to the services of teachers. If we look upon the criterion of mental health that is fulfilment of relationship, adaptability in accordance with given situation, and involvement in productive activities. It appears that DNEP 2020 is not going to provide mental peace or mental health to both students and teachers. For students it is likely to increase their load of learning while giving undue emphasis upon various subjects, skills and especially archaic value. The process of assessment, characterised by extremely centralized structure suggests a level of distrust not only of teachers and students rather of the entire internal mechanism. The provision of conducting internal examinations by external authorities is going to prove to be a deadly burden to students. DNEP 2020 is also likely to increase mental troubles of teachers on a permanent basis through its conception of the structure and mechanism related to recruitment, terms and conditions of service of teachers, and proposal of career management progression which is highly subjective and purely new liberal in all respects. Where there will be no place for a teacher's voice to raise their grievances in the form of any collective entity whether subject organisation/association or teacher union in real sense of the term.

### Introduction

National Education Policy 2020, as we know was declared on July 29, 2020 by the central government after an approval by the Union Cabinet. It is important to know that this policy was declared bypassing the parliament of the country, as it was not placed before parliament for deliberation and discussion. Similarly, states were not taken into confidence while preparing this policy. Notwithstanding the undemocratic character of the process of this policy making. Policy claimed to revitalise all and sundry aspects of education. Since the government did not follow the parliamentary convention related to deliberation and discussion on this policy. Therefore, it will be appropriate to call it the Draft of National Education Policy 2020(henceforth DNEP 2020).

In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the implication of DNEP 2020 on mental health of the students and teachers in the light of various provisions related to foundational

literacy and numeracy, curriculum and pedagogy and term and conditions related to the services of teachers. Analysis is confined upto impact related to mental health, and it has been looked at in the context of school education only.

Before entering into the discussion and analysis of various provisions of DNEP 2020 in the context of mental health of the students and teachers it appears to be worthwhile to understand the conception of mental health in a brief manner. Mental health is often referred to the conditions of mentality of any individual thereby any individual could pursue various activities (mental as well as physical) without any undue stress and tension.

According to Dr. Mike Condra, "the mental health of any individual can be analysed on the basis of three criterion (1) Involvement in any kind of productive activity. (2) Involvement and pursuance of relationship of various kinds. (3) An ability to adapt in accordance with changing situation in an appropriate manner. He further

opines that mental health of any individual can be viewed in contrast to some symptoms of mental illness such as lack of concentration, unpleasant changes in the behaviour, lack of feeling of pleasure and happiness and irregular and unpredictable expression of some unwanted or an undesirable act". Thus it appears that mental health is that state of mind of any individual in which one feels stress free while undertaking any activity whether it be studying and learning for students, teaching for teacher and pursuance of any work by an individual with which one is associated.

In the light of the broad parameter of mental health, we shall try to look at the various provisions of DNEP 2020 with the view to understand that in which manner these provisions are going to affect the mental health of the students and teachers.

### **ECCE, foundational learning and mental health**

DNEP 2020 claimed to achieve a well-rounded holistic development of learner through the various provision of the same as it states the fundamental principles that will guide both the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within it are: recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student's holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres; according the highest priority to achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

The underlying assumption of above fundamental principles clearly reveals that put together policy of foundational learning seems to promote the push on acquiring the skills of reading, writing and numeracy at the completion of grade 3 i.e. at the age of 5. This is not merely detrimental to mental health of the children rather equally harmful to the physical health of the children. Though theoretically above two fundamental principles commit to some extent for non-academic aspects of education. However it is evidently clear from public perception (which is being promoted by the nexus of politician, bureaucrats, corporate and the lobbies of the private players which runs all kinds of private schools) that people are by default aspire to make learn their children literacy, numeracy and other cognitive skills at

the earliest possible age. Many researches suggest that people do not seem to be ready to understand the ill-effect of that kind of hasty learning. Prof. Krishan Kumar drew our attention towards the ill-effects of such earlier exposure of reading writing and numeracy to children in one of the high profile webinar held at Indian International Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2020. While referring various international studies, he concluded that by all psychological standards and theory of learning. It is inadvisable to expose the children to reading so long they are not able to understand the meaning of particular text which they are expected to read.

Furthermore he pointed out that at this tender age when their bones are in the process of formation and stability it is inappropriate to expose them to the process of writing.

DNEP 2020 recognises that 85 percent of the brain development occurs prior to the age of 6 (though this claim is contested by various studies), therefore best possible effort should be done to provide a conducive environment to children for their holistic development. In accordance with this understanding DNEP 2020 seeks to coin the rationale for beginning of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from the age of 3. In the earlier years of the education it has been suggested that children should be nourished through good nutritious food and activity based education such as playway activity, inquiry based learning comprising of alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement. Furthermore policy seeks to achieve a number of skills and values of which many are highly abstract in nature which includes among other developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation etc.

Policy envisages optimal outcomes in the domains of: physical and motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural/artistic development, and the development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy as an overarching aim of ECCE. The list of our referred domain of learning and items of learning is problematic in many ways. The

expectation of the alleged optimal outcome of learning for this very age i.e 3 to 5 are beyond the recommendation of any major theory of learning whether it is Piaget's theory of cognitive development or theory of social learning of Bandura or Vygotsky's theory of Sociocultural Development or any other theory. None of these theories proposes to attach such an abstract and multiple expectation of learning by the children at this age. For all practical purposes it seems utterly difficult to achieve these laudable objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education with the existing structure of Anganwadis, balwadis and pre schools along with the proposed shift in the structure of ECCE. Most of the critics apprehended quite correctly that ultimately it will land upon imposition of literacy and numeracy on children in much earlier age, which has already begun to happen in metropolitan cities, small and semi-urban towns of various states. DNEP 2020 considers basic reading, writing and preliminary operations of arithmetic as essential prerequisite for foundational development of the education of children. On the basis of some dubiously designed survey by various non-governmental agencies it concludes that large number of students of elementary grade are not able to perform the literary and numeral skill as per the expectations adhered to their respective grades/classes. This problem has been highlighted as a learning crisis with best possible drum beats to demonstrate the alleged openness and transparency. (Ironically enough number of open and naked crisis and reality of the Indian society have been dubbed under the carpet by this policy as policy author are totally unaware or knobby about the reality of the caste system, deteriorated condition of the tribal people, subjugation of women, discrimination meted out to person with disability, plight of minority and above all constitutional provision of reservation for SC/ST/OBC/person with disability, women etc.). Policy proposes Activity Based Learning with the help of a workbook and other teaching – learning methods which virtually seem to focus upon learning of literacy and numeral skills. Further the policy proposes National Literacy Mission and online platforms to promote foundational learning which are problematic in various manners. The proposal of National Literacy Mission clearly reveals that policy regards foundational education in terms of numeracy and literacy only, which is one part of

education but it cannot be synonymous of education. The emphasis on online platforms at this level is nothing more than infatuation to concessional plunder by the world of online racketeers with total obliviousness about the impact of use of the screens of various electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones, television etc. Many critics pointed out that learning through online platforms is meant to promote the business of Edu-business Company which are directly or indirectly part of the nexuses which is promoting this kind of idea.

In this very section, the policy talks about promotion and spread of the network of libraries which may be regarded as a welcome step at the outset. However, the preferences of this government in practice suggest merely that if these kinds of libraries are opened, these will be filled with religio-moral and communal literature which is designed to socialise the children to just learn Hindu supremacist ideology. Mere moral preaching through books cannot lead to open ended expansion of mental horizon of any individual/children. These preferences are mentioned in chapter 4 of this policy namely 'Curriculum and Pedagogy' as it states children will have the opportunity to read and learn from the original stories of the Panchatantra, Jataka, Hitopadesh, and other fun fables and inspiring tales from the Indian tradition and learn about their influences on global literature. Policy recognises the importance of healthy and nutritious food in the process of cognitive and physical development and proposes to provide the additional morning breakfast along with existing mid day meal which appear to be positive step for the nourishment of the children. It further proposed to provide dry breakfast in form of groundnuts, channa mixed with jaggery wherever it would be difficult to provide cooked hot breakfast. The alternative proposal of dry breakfast seems apparently to do something instead of doing nothing. However, critics suspects on the basis of concrete evidence that it is an attempt to give backdoor entry to packed food especially to the lobby of biscuit industry. Professor R. Govinda recorded in his speech in one of the webinars organised by Council of Social Development of the Society, New Delhi that we struggle hard to prevent the biscuit industry from entering into the arena of mid day meal. Thus it is sufficiently clear that this provision of dry breakfast is also meant to facilitate the entry of private packed food

industry. Policy promises to have regular health checkup of the students at ECCE level including primary education to the tune of health checkups in the Anganwadis. However it does not mention specific indicators to check the mental health of the children at any level. It is equally important to know that the provision of regular health checkups of the students at least upto the level of matriculation or tenth standard is already there under various schemes so there is nothing new has been initiated under this Policy.

### **Curriculum and pedagogy and mental health**

The issue of mental health of the children has been ignored most blatantly in the section devoted to Curriculum and Pedagogy which has been included as chapter 4 in the document. This section is probably the lengthiest section given in the policy aspiring virtually to cover probably everything in the universe. We will analyse some key areas of curriculum and pedagogy which are clear testimony of the flagrant violation of the indicator of the mental health. For instance, the issue of multilingualism and power of language is the most important concern which is fit for such analyses. This section has been written from 4.11 to 4.21 as part of chapter 4 with great passion as learning of languages itself is an ultimate attainment of moksha or nirvana. This section underscore the importance of acquisition of linguistic knowledge or innate ability of grasping languages by the children from the age of 2-8. On the basis of recent research without singling out any important study and its data in this regard. The prima facie such claims are dubious and controversial in its nature according to Prof. Joga Singh of Linguistics Department of Punjabi University Patiala, Punjab. There are a number of researches and prevailing practices which are contrary to such claims. To him, in countries like China and a number of European Countries languages other than mother language are taught between age of 9-15. He cited many examples in the webinar of All India Forum of Right to Education (AIFRTE) on the subject related to NEP 2020 and issue of languages. From various countries where a number of languages are taught at a later age.

Policy seems to steal undue credit for the inclusion of the idea of education in mother tongue as it contains the provision to provide education in mother tongue/ home language/ regional language upto primary level and wishes to continue the same upto elementary level with

the rider of “wherever it is possible.” This rider apparently meant to provide back door exemption to private schools which are run in English medium irrespective of their eligibility to fulfill norms of Right to Education Act 2009. It is noteworthy that there is a constitutional obligation upon the centre and state government to provide education in mother tongue upto primary level under Article 350A of the Constitution of India. In accordance with the spirit of this very Article previous to educational policy also strongly advocated the idea of education in mother tongue upto primary level. Had this provision been made compulsory to all schools irrespective of their nature and character it would have certainly proved to be a great step to provide some kind of mental relief to the children of India. The way it has been proposed in the DNEP 2020 it will surely increase the mental burden on children which may jeopardize their mental health considerably.

Like the earlier policy DNEP 2020 also contained the three language formula to promote the linguistic and regional harmony in the state. The way this formula has been conceptualised is not free from the biases of the government in favour of Hindi and Sanskrit, which are been promoted both directly or indirectly to appease the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) and its allied organisations. Taken together DNEP 2020 proposes the necessity of learning four to six languages including one foreign language from Grade 3 to Grade 12 which is a tyranny over the mental health of the children. Children will have to study a number of other subjects also which will surely increase their mental burden at substantial level. In order to learn the four to six languages number of projects and activities have been suggested in DNEP 2020 which includes gamification and quizzes on the basis of various apps and other online mediums, which will increase the engagement of students with digital screen which is again injurious for their mental as well as their physical health.

DNEP 2020 proposes elimination of disciplinary boundaries as well as hard separation of the various academic streams such as arts, commerce, science, vocational education and academic education. It tends to replace an existing arrangement of above mentioned academic streams with the jumbling of various subjects and alleged vocation in a strange manner. Though its blueprint in detail is yet to



come through the National Curricular Framework of Secondary Education, yet the outline of the same seems utterly confusing. Critics are of the opinion that this kind of framework may be most troublesome to a large number of first generation learners. On account of lack of appropriate guidance about selection of the subject from the family, they might end up with most unwanted choices of the subject. See an interview of Prof. Rohit Dhankar (Professor of Philosophy of Education) Azim Premji University, Bangalore. If we look at the list of subjects, skills, and values given in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of NEP 2020 from 4.23 to 4.28 we find that an attempt is made to teach too much from Grade 3 to Grade 12 which is a totally unjust and criminal joke with the mental health of the children. These subjects vary in its degree and nature in a comprehensive manner which ranges from physical fitness to artificial intelligence and global citizenship education. Similarly in terms of skills it covers a wide variety of skills ranging from simple communication to mathematical reasoning and artificial intelligence etc.. It seems inappropriate here to give the entire list of skills, subjects and values which is given in the above mentioned points of the chapter 4.

### **Transforming assessment for student development and mental health**

The entire process of education turned largely superfluous when it is integrally connected with examination or assessment. The process of examination proves the most serious blow to the mental health of the children. We have witnessed numerous cases of children suicide due to exam related stress in last many years. This anxiety led to a number of reforms especially to the various provisions of Right to Education Act 2009. DNEP 2020 pushed back the agenda of examination reform at least 10 years back. The careful analysis of the section of DNEP 2020 which is related to the process of assessment clearly testifies this seemingly harsh statement. In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of DNEP 2020 there is a section which runs from 4.34 to 4.42 entitled, "Transforming Assessment for Student Development". The careful study of this section establishes sufficiently that on the name of transforming assessment policy did not only centralise the system of assessment rather it distrusted both teachers and students. While sealing off non-detention policy in its totality, policy proposed examination at third, fifth and

eighth standard as an internal examination. However, these examinations are supposed to be conducted by an external agency which may even be the National Testing Agency. Furthermore, policy proposes to continue the board exams at 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> level more or less according to existing patterns. The involvement of the external agency in the initial grades of the school structure (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) with a view to emphasis on learning outcome without due weightage to process based learning will increase the mental anxiety of children, parents, teachers and heads of the school irrespective of their nomenclature. This stress will surely affect the mental wellbeing of all the stakeholders in a considerable manner. The proposed pattern of board exam with the preposition of minor and major subjects is further likely to compound the mental stress of the stakeholder. The so-called meritocracy approach in the selection of minor and major subjects is likely to prove stigmatic against those children who will make mathematics or science as their minor subject. Policy contained the provision of the National Assessment Centre under the ages of NCERT and agencies like PARKH to carry out and regulate the various aspects of assessment. This step is an indication of extreme centralisation of the process of assessment. A little involvement of the teacher in the entire process of assessment seems to engulf the sense of distrust upon the teacher in the society. In all probability this will lead to the large scale marginalisation and alienation among teachers which will further weaken their academic and social prestige in the society.

In the last part of the chapter 4 on curriculum and pedagogy policy proposes to provide support and impetus to gifted children and advocates the innate talents of the alleged gifted students. Furthermore, in point 4.45 a considerable emphasis is given upon organisation and participation of the children in various kinds of national and international competitions including Olympiads at various levels. Policy also proposes to link the achievements of the students in such competitions with the admission process at higher levels of education (probably at senior secondary, under graduation and post graduation level). These proposals are not only against the theory of learning rather these proposals are also meant to undermine the sense of collectivity at the expense of extreme individuality. The ill-effect of such provision on the mental health or

mental make-up of rural and less exposed resourceless children of urban areas are self evident or self explanatory. This kind of provision may led to exclusion of resourceless children from the entire landscape of education. The provisions are totally against the recommendation and spirit of the most widely hailed report of the National Advisory Committee to reduce the load of learning (which is popularly known as Prof. Yaspal Committee Report on learning without burden). In this report Yashpal Committee seriously recommended the reduction of individuality-based competition.

As the report states, “A number of organisations and departments organise competitions at district, state and national level for students in various fields such as school subjects, exhibitions, essay writing, elocution, etc. Perhaps the spirit behind these activities is to recognise and reward the talent in diverse fields. But, unfortunately this tends to produce somewhat unhealthy singling out of people for their brief moment of glory. Competitions where individual achievement is rewarded need to be discouraged since they deprive children of joyful learning. However, group activities and group achievements must be encouraged and rewarded to give a boost to cooperative learning in schools.

### **Teachers, teacher education and service conditions**

Teachers are the cornerstone of any educational agenda whether it is educational policies, framework or any program of action because teachers are the prime agencies by which educational programs are translated into reality. Previous to education policy accorded very esteemed position to the teachers not only on paper rather they proposed some concrete steps to maintain and uphold the respectable status to teacher in academic and social milieu. They recognised teacher collective in form of their subject association and teacher union and placed onus of them as a collective at least to implement certain aspects related to the educational policies.

DNEP 2020 tends to project illusively enough without recognising the fact that the importance of teachers has been duly acknowledged in earlier policy also. It claims that the teacher has been given a central position in the educational

processes at first time in this policy as it writes “The teacher must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in the education system. The new education policy must help to re-establish teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens. It must do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible. The new education policy must help recruit the very best and brightest to enter 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.”

The above quote is an opening remark in the DNEP 2020. Apparently it sounds very progressive and forward looking with true efforts to uphold the dignity of the teaching community. The decoding of the implication gradually leads towards a hidden agenda of making teachers such servient of the nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, corporate and private entrepreneurs of various kinds. In this very quote the term quality control is clearly indicative of the corporate style of management in which all the functionaries are viewed as nothing more than cog in the machine. The recent trend of various kinds of contractual recruitment of the teachers with very retrogressive terms and conditions of services are clear testimonies themselves towards the direction which is likely to get followed and the kind of mental trauma which it is likely to produce in the life of teachers.

In DNEP 2020, three different chapters have been exclusively devoted to discuss the role and term and condition of the services of the teachers. Of them two chapters namely chapter 13 ‘Motivated, Energized and Capable Faculty’ and chapter 15 ‘Teacher Education’ are placed in the part related to higher education and chapter 5 entitled ‘Teachers’ is mentioned in the part related to school education. The careful analysis of above mentioned three chapters clearly suggests that there is considerable reiteration and repetition of certain conditionality which have been originally mentioned in the chapter 5<sup>th</sup> i.e. Teachers. There are some specific provisions related to the terms and conditions of the teachers which should cause serious concern and alarm for the career of teachers and definitely they will take away the mental peace from the

life of teachers. For instance, point 5.5 of DNEP 2020 proposes that, “To ensure an adequate number of teachers across subjects - particularly in subjects such as art, physical education, vocational education, and languages - teachers could be recruited to a school or school complex and the sharing of teachers across schools could be considered in accordance with the grouping-of-schools adopted by State/UT governments”. It implies that teacher of certain subject such as art, craft and physical education etc. will be appointed at school complex level or at the level of grouping of the school under any kind of physical nomenclature and they will have to roam around across various schools and they will not be able to establish constant bonding with the children and teachers of one school. Their nature of job will be unstable at least in terms of workload and station. Point 5.10 of DNEP 2020 authorises State/UT to adapt and innovative many formats, such as school complex, rationalisation of schools, without in any way reducing accessibility, for effective school governance, resource sharing, and community building. For all practical purposes implication of such rationalisation is synonymous to closure and shifting of various schools from one location to another which will render many teachers jobless or partially employed. Furthermore, such rationalisation will compel frequent shifting or transfer of a number of teachers from one place to another which will negatively impact upon their mental health.

DNEP 2020 considered a central piece of innovative idea to its proposal of alleged, ‘a robust merit-based structure of tenure, promotion, and salary structure’ without giving detail with concrete examples of such merit based salary structure. It promises to develop a promotion system in such a way that with outstanding work one can be promoted at higher level at least in terms of salary while technically remaining in the same cadre. (This alleged innovative idea tend to suggest mischievously enough that as if there was not any system of promotion to promote the primary teacher at all. The advocates of this policy are trying to put praiseworthy phrases and sentences in the mouth of the teacher as if primary teachers are most thrilled with these measures and they are likely to be most benefited by this system of promotion.) Policy proposes performance based system of appraisal of the performance instead of temporal promotion and increments on the

basis of the seniority or the length of tenure. According to this document, ‘A system of multiple parameters for proper assessment of performance will be developed for the same by State/UT Governments that is based on peer reviews, attendance, commitment, hours of CPD, and other forms of service to the school and the community or based on NPST’. It is noteworthy that most of the above referred indicators are highly subjective and totally depend upon the whims and fancy of the immediate bosses and bureaucrats to interpret the performance of any teacher in accordance with their own convenience. It is very much obvious that in case concerned authorities are displeased with any teacher they can prevent the promotion and financial benefit of that person. The current practices and autocratic mode of functioning of existing dispensation. All those teachers who do not confirm the ideology and practices of this regime can be conveniently penalised for the same. DNEP 2020 in point 5.20 contained in plain terms that parameters for performance appraisal will be strictly devised at all the levels. It further affirms that, ‘Promotions and salary increases will not occur based on the length of tenure or seniority, but only on the basis of such appraisal’. It is evidently establishes that days are about to go when teacher had permanent tenure of service and temporal promotion and increments. New career management system of teacher is purely in line with corporate style of management which virtually terms every worker as casual labour. Coupled with the ideology of Hindu supremacism adopted by current dispensation, this will be led to manifold exploitation of the teacher. Above all this should be taken into account with utmost seriousness that DNEP 2020 does not recognise the existence of teacher organisations or teacher unions directly or indirectly at any level rather it may go into extent upto banning all such disadvantage in one go. How it will influence mental health of the teacher probably need not to be repeated here.

## Conclusion

In lieu of conclusion it can be inferred that if we look upon the criterion of mental health that is fulfillment of relationship, adaptability in accordance with given situation, and involvement in productive activities. It appears that DNEP 2020 is not going to provide mental peace or mental health to both students and

teachers. For students it is likely to increase their load of learning while giving undue emphasis upon various subjects, skills and especially archaic value. The process of assessment which is supposed to distrust not only teachers and students but rather the entire internal mechanism of assessment is going to be a deadly burden for students as internal examination is conducted by external authorities. Furthermore, the conception of promotion of national and international competition such as Olympiads at various levels along with its interlinkage with the admission process at higher levels of education is likely to

remain the source of constant tension for students. DNEP 2020 is likely to increase mental troubles of teacher on permanent basis through its conception of the structure and mechanism related to recruitment, terms and conditions of service of teacher, and proposal of career management progression which is highly subjective and purely new liberal in all respects, where there will no place for teacher's voice to raise their grievances in form of any collective entity whether subject organisation/association or teacher union in real sense of the term.

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