In Search of Sustainable Teacher Education System in India
A Reflection   on the Recommendations of National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

Teachers are the greatest assets, and teacher education is a significant component of any education system. Creating quality teachers and a sustainable teacher education system is the primary aspiration of each nation. There is widespread agreement that teacher education has an important role to play in the attainment of the SDG 4 targets of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. No doubt, there have been a number of commissions and committees instituted and introduced from time to time. They have put forth their recommendations for the improvement of quality in teacher education, among which National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a significant and recent one. This article critically examines the recommendations outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and their implications for fostering sustainable teacher education in India.

Keywords: National Education Policy, Teacher Education, Sustainable Development Goals

1.0   Introduction

The current education system presents a fragmented and compartmentalised approach to learning. Subjects are typically taught in isolation, ignoring the interconnectedness of knowledge and its application to real-world challenges. This approach fails to prepare students for their holistic development and ultimately lead to social inequality. Therefore, it is thought that the education system must transform to meet the demands of students who are calling for transformative education that addresses sustainable development. While education has long been

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heralded as a crucial catalyst for sustainable development, the potential of education to drive impactful environmental, economic, and societal change has yet to be met. Many education systems have also introduced innovative policies to bring these topics into the classroom. But commitments do not always result in action, and policies do not always translate into impact. The roadblocks are universal, including curricula largely based on passive instead of experiential learning, and mechanical and top-down approaches that ignore the imperative to adapt to special needs and circumstances. Teachers who lack adequate training in sustainable development to effectively impart its corresponding knowledge, skills, and values are another hurdle. The absence of teacher training in sustainable development stands in the way of delivering education for sustainable development competencies, such as integrated problem-solving, critical thinking, systems thinking, self-awareness, and collaboration.

Integrating sustainability into education requires moving beyond individual disciplines and identifying common principles applicable across fields, such as resource management, environmental impact assessment, life-cycle analysis, and governance and social equity. This allows students to see the interconnectedness of sustainability across various subjects, fostering a deeper understanding of its impact on society and the environment. By seamlessly weaving these concepts into curricula across disciplines, from engineering and architecture to business and economics, educators can provide students with a holistic perspective on sustainability, empowering them to make informed decisions and contribute to positive change while ensuring that the global development and economic engine keeps running.

Today, we are living in a world engulfed in challenges and issues in every sphere of life. To enable a sustainable safe space of peace and prosperity for people across the planet, the United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, at the heart of which are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2015). Education is very essential for the overall development of human personality. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for individuals to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. In the same line of thinking, the National Education Policy 2020 envisages quality education that is relevant and applicable within the context of the dynamic and fast-changing nature of the education space in India and the world.

Teaching is a creative and reflective profession, which assumes that the teacher can reconcile the normative demands that are placed on his professionalism with a dynamically varying situation in the educational reality with regard to the transformation requirements for humanisation and personalisation of the state curriculum. Teacher education has gained increasingly importance and momentum since a long time, as teachers' abilities and qualities are identified as decisive to students' learning. It is directly linked with all other stages of education and the profession; hence, it is rightly said that teaching is a profession that creates all other professions. The 11th Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2014) makes it clear that good teachers are essential for enhancing the quality of learning, and teacher education is important because of its impact on teacher quality. As an integral component of the educational system, teacher education is intimately connected with society and is conditioned by the ethos, culture and character of a nation. The constitutional goals, the directive principles of the state policy, the socio-economic problems and the growth of the

knowledge, the emerging expectations and changes operating in education, etc. call for an appropriate response from a futuristic education system and provide the perspective within which teacher education programmes need to be viewed. Education of teachers needs to strengthen and stress the main attributes of a profession, such as the systematic theory, rigorous training over a specified duration, authority, community sanction, ethical code and culture, generating knowledge through research and specialisation. It is already acknowledged that formal professional training on a continuous basis is necessary for becoming a good teacher as it caters to the development of one's personality, sharpening of communication skills, and commitment to a code of conduct (Verma 2006).

Teacher education is the process of providing teachers and potential teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach effectively in a classroom environment or outside the classroom. It is the professional preparation in pedagogy for those who want to enter the teaching profession.

1.1 Teacher Education in India: Perspective Approach

In recent years, India has taken a fresh and more critical look at the role of education for national as well as social development. In order to meet expectations, teachers have to assume greater responsibility to initiate action for the transformation of society as agents of social change and thereby help achieve the goal of national development. Thus, success in carrying out educational reforms and acceptance of the new role by teachers depend on the quality of teachers, which, in turn, depends on the quality of teacher education. Quality in teacher education concerns preparing quality teachers who have competencies in several fields and commitment to their profession. There has been a lot of talk in various commissions and committees regarding teacher education, as they put forth their recommendations for improvement of the quality of teacher education. The major concern of all education commissions and committees was the reform of the teacher education programme. To assess the quality of the teacher education programme, special stress is being given to learning outcomes. In this connection, the role of 'teacher trainee teachers' has been increased many folds.

1.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Rethinking Teachers' Education

Established in 2015, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework of 17 interconnected objectives to address global challenges. Among these, SDG 4 (Quality Education) emphasises the crucial role of education in empowering individuals to address sustainability concerns. Therefore, it is essential that teacher education not only encompasses sustainability concepts but also offer holistic and interdisciplinary teaching methods on the topic (Bourn et al. 2017, Yemini et al. 2019,and Saperstein 2020). However, the integration of SDGs into teacher education is influenced by regional, cultural, economic, and political contexts, requiring challenges (Penger et al. 2015, Oikawa 2016, Caniglia et al. 2018, and Dür and Keller 2018).

UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) emphasises the importance of equity in education globally, promoting inclusive and quality learning opportunities for all. In India, various policies have been formulated to attain SDG 4. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the need for an inclusive and equitable education system. It

emphasises reducing disparities based on socio-economic status, gender, and geographical location. In order to make the teacher education programmes sustainable, it recommends that teacher education institutions need to incorporate the principle of inclusion in the admission of students, curriculum, teaching-learning process and assessment. It is felt time and again that lifelong learning is a driver of development and transformation. For teacher education programmes, it involves candidates learning to teach students to become committed lifelong learners and to learn on their own. It also involves candidates being committed to lifelong learning, student-centred learning, and constructivism.

1.3   National Education Policy 2020: An insight

After Independence, the emerging socioeconomic and political situations influenced the national scenario of Teacher Education. The Government of India set up different Committees and Commissions for addressing the specific issues of education in general and teacher education in particular. In this context of reforms in teacher education in India, the National Education Policy (NEP) came into existence on 29 July 2020.

Here's an overview of key recommendations across various dimensions.

- NEP 2020 focuses on inclusive education and explores how teacher education programmes can address diverse learning needs while integrating sustainability, ensuring that teachers are equipped to create inclusive and environmentally conscious learning environments. It recommends ways in which teachers' education can instil a sense of environmental responsibility by encouraging them to actively engage with local communities to promote sustainable practices.
- NEP 2020 suggests the establishment of a robust institutional framework for teacher education with a focus on research and innovation in education. It also advocates for the restructuring of teacher education programmes, moving towards a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme that combines high-quality general education with specialised teacher preparation.
- In order to introduce sustainable practices, the policy emphasises flexibility and a multidisciplinary learning approach to teacher education, ensuring that teachers have a broad understanding of various subjects. The curriculum is expected to be updated regularly to incorporate the latest research and pedagogical practices.
- NEP 2020 promotes the integration of traditional Indian knowledge systems, including local arts, crafts, and languages, into the teacher education curriculum. This is aimed at fostering a sense of cultural rootedness and pride among teachers and students. It also encourages the inclusion of indigenous components in teacher education to reflect the diversity of Indian cultures. This involves incorporating local practices, languages, and traditions into the curriculum to make it more contextually relevant.
- The policy emphasises on integrated pedagogical approaches. It discusses ways in which teacher education programmes can incorporate sustainability across subjects, promoting an interdisciplinary understanding of environmental issues. This includes experiential learning, interactive methods, and technology integration to make the training more effective and engaging. NEP

2020 highlights on technology-enabled learning. It focuses on how technology integration can enhance environmental awareness among teachers, offering innovative tools and resources for incorporating sustainability into classroom practices. The focus is on preparing teachers to be student-centric, catering to the diverse needs of learners. The training envisions equipping teachers to adopt inclusive practices, address the socio-emotional needs of students, and create a positive and supportive learning environment.

- The policy recommends a comprehensive overhaul of teacher assessment methods. It emphasises continuous and comprehensive evaluation of teachers, moving away from traditional examination-based assessments to more holistic and competency-based evaluations.
- The policy underscores the need for stringent teacher eligibility tests (TET) to ensure the recruitment of qualified and competent teachers.
- NEP 2020 underscores the importance of the continuous professional development of teachers. It highlights the potential for integrating sustainability into continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, ensuring that teachers and teacher educators stay abreast of eco-friendly teaching methods and practices as well as updated with the latest pedagogical practices.

1.4   Development of Teacher Education in India

In India, the idea of formal teacher training originated out of an indigenous technique, called 'Monitorial System'. It was based on the principle of mutual instruction. The Wood's Despatch, (General Council on Education in India 1854), an important educational document released on 19 July 1854, gave very valuable suggestions for the improvement of the education of teachers. In 1859, Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for India, greatly emphasised teacher training (*see* Mukerji 1951, Chapter-4:130-155). In 1859, the new grant-in-aid rules provided that salary grants to schools be given to those teachers who had obtained a certificate of teacher training. The Sadler Commission (Sadler 1920) recommended the introduction of Education as an optional subject at the Graduation and P.G. level. It had salutary effect on the teacher training programme in India. The work initiated by the Sadler Commission was further carried on by the Hartog Committee (Hartog 1929). The Committee was primarily concerned with primary education but it made far-reaching recommendations for teacher training as well. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 1944 (GoI 1944) presented a scheme of education 'Post-war Educational Development in India', popularly known as the 'Sergeant Plan' (Sargent 1948), recommending that suitable boys and girls should be picked out for the teaching profession after high school; practical training should be provided, refresher courses be planned, and research facilities provided. The University Education Commission, 1948-49 (Anon.1949), named immediately after independence, proposed making teaching courses more practical and versatile. The school procedure was recommended for not less than 12 weeks. It recognised that 'theory and practice must go hand in hand, and each must help and shed light on the other'. The Secondary Education Commission proposed broadening the scope of teacher education, especially in practical terms, and educating a graduate teacher in pedagogy in at least two subjects.

After the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, (*see* NCERT 2005) a tremendous change has been witnessed in the school education system through content, methodology, and pedagogy of teaching as well as learning. This brought about a change in the demands and expectations placed on teacher compared to the traditional system. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009 addressed this issue and attempted to reorganise the teacher education system according to the changes envisaged through NCF 2005. Specific recommendations and suggestions for the improvement of teacher education system were given in the document. The Justice Verma Commission (2012) report (GoI 2012) has also provided specific recommendations for restructuring pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher education to improve the quality education. Based on the recommendations of the Justice Verma Commission report, the NCTE initiated the process of restructuring pre-service teacher education programmes, starting from developing affiliation norms to the curriculum of the programme.

NCTE has adopted a two-way strategy to ensure quality in teacher education. The first approach involves the development of curriculum guidelines through nationwide consultations, following by persuading and supporting the State Governments and Universities to undertake the reconstruction of their teacher education curricula. The second strategy involves the development of norms and standards for various teacher education programmes, assessing the activities of new institutions offering Teacher Education Programmes, as well as continuous monitoring and supervision of recognised institutions. Action is taken if necessary against institutions found violating the prescribed norms and standards. Taking serious note of these developments, agencies responsible for education from nursery to tertiary and professional education have reviewed their programmes and courses of study. Comprehensive assessment and evaluation techniques are used to measure the professional abilities of students.

A critical analysis of NEP 2020 and teacher education creates certain guiding points for action, which are mentioned as under:

- For the proper operation and governance of teacher education programmes, State-specific Regulatory Board may be established in each state along with a Central regulatory Board.
- Priority and funding need to be made available for establishing and starting teacher education programmes in all universities and institutions of higher education.
- Adequate funding needs to be allocated for providing and expanding hostel facilities for women and disadvantaged students, especially in rural and backward areas.
- Experimental schools must be established and run under the jurisdiction of the Department of education.
- Higher education institutions that are offering or are going to offer teacher education programme should be networked with various training and counselling centres, which should provide consultancy and guidance to prospective and in-service teachers.
- Life skills and capacity building programmes for prospective and in-service teachers are to be organised.

- Resource centres need to be started along with each higher education institutions for mobilising the future workforce.
- Curriculum of each programme needs to be designed and revised to incorporate the current issues.
- Research components (theoretical and practical) need to be included in teacher education programme at all levels i.e. 4yr/2yr/1yr B.Ed.
- Prospective and in-service teachers, both men and women, need to be oriented to handle children with special needs.
- Heads of higher education institutions need to be empowered through various programmes such as educational management, governance, and leadership training for the quality sustenance of teacher education programmes.
- Professional development programmes for college and university teachers need to be continuous, need-based, and to capture all sections of faculty members.

1.5   Conclusion

There are two established notions about teacher education: first, every country designs teacher education according to its socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts; and, second, hardly any country is satisfied with its existing teacher education programmes. Therefore, each country is trying to strengthen its teacher education system. It is hoped that the analysis of existing teacher education policies and practices will definitely help make teacher education in the country more relevant and quality-oriented in the future. There is a need to re-examine the teacher education curriculum to humanize it and eliminate inhuman activities and incidents. If we want to continue our march towards an enlightened and humane society, many more possibilities have to be explored to prepare teachers who can fittingly face challenges posed by the forces of modernisation, globalisation, and consequent rising aspirations. Teacher education programmes have to gear up to meet the emerging needs on the one hand and remain contextual, cost-effective, and continuously transform based on indigenous experiences on the other.

So, there needs to be a well-defined structure for the career progression of teachers and teacher educators. Freedom needs to be provided to choose appropriate pedagogy and teaching methods. Linkage needs to be established among qualification, performance, experience, salary, and promotion. In this connection, it is widely felt that 21st-century Indian human power has to take a leading role in creating a peaceful, prosperous, and progressive society. NEP 2020 is a wonderful document that promises to translate the vision into reality and prepare humanistic and reflective teachers. In conclusion, professionalism needs to be instilled in each and every phase of teacher preparation, starting from conceptualisation to evaluation, in order to prepare professionals who can contribute to the overall improvement of the quality of education. The university departments and teacher education institutions need to play a critical role in transforming the existing teacher education landscape in India to align with the aspirations and recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Their pivotal role encompasses various aspects, including curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, research initiatives, and the development of a teacher education ecosystem that aligns with the NEP 2020 objectives.

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