The Idea of School Teacher in the National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

This paper analyses the idea and conception of the school teacher in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It explains the various reasons discussed in the research studies and the National Education Policy to assign a centrality to the school teacher in order to bring educational reform. The article examines the idea of the school teacher through the lens of NEP 2020 considering four frames of reference namely language schism, community, incentivisation and performance to discuss the construct of the teacher in NEP 2020.

Introduction

Various facets of the service conditions of the school teachers in India such as increasing contractualisation since 1990s, poor working conditions and lack of pay parity have received attention in the reports of various commissions and in the researches on the motivation of teachers (Ramachandran, 2005). Teachers' core work of teaching-learning is often unsupported as they work amid many lacks, primarily those of resources and materials. Research and policy have placed the blame of the system's inability to address the concerns of equity and quality on teachers' inaction, absenteeism, apathy, deficit, and epistemological beliefs in the ineducability of the children from marginalised communities.

Their professional status is nebulous as they have been mired in administrative responsibilities, kept away from decision-making and subject to a system where results, outcomes, and efficiency have to be showcased. Teacher failure

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cascades through student failure as poor performance of students in various national and state surveys is blamed solely on the teacher. Some support is found in in-service teacher programmes and ICT initiatives, such as DIKSHA. However, it has been argued that training is often not need-based, and often couched in a language of 'deficit', where workshops and seminars attempt to 'fill the gaps' (TISS-AUD, 2019). The National Education Policy 2020 aims to intervene and reshape this landscape.

AREA OF RESEARCH

This paper attempts to focus on the idea and conception of the teacher in NEP 2020. The policy assigns a certain pre-eminence to the teacher. To understand its conception of the teacher, expectations from them, and the distinctive ways in which change and transformation are postulated in the policy vis-a-vis the teacher, this paper focuses on: (i) why is it important to focus on the teacher, (ii) the idea of a teacher, (iii) teacher professionalism, (iv) appointments and communities of practice.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the paper are:
 (i) To examine the new ways of thinking that have emerged in the National Education Policy 2020.
 (ii) To understand the issues around the teacher's work and teacher quality recalibrated in the National Education Policy.

(iii) To understand the way NEP 2020 imagines the development of the capacity of teachers and the quality of school education.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the above objectives, this study undertakes a systematic review of the various government reports and documents, research reports and journal articles to understand the nature of concerns about teachers. Then, it undertakes a critical policy analysis of the NEP 2020 and subsequently, makes arguments based on the analysis of the secondary data.

DISCOURSE ON THE 'TEACHER EFFECT'

Teachers have acquired a distinct centrality in the policy discourses on education, education reforms, learning of students and quality of school education (NCTE 2009; OECD 2005; Gomendio 2017). A series of research studies spells out multiple answers to the question— why is improving the quality of teachers so crucial to improve the quality of education in a developing country.

The first set of arguments pertains to the crucial effect of the 'school dependent factors' (quality of teachers, resources, community-based management and adequate infrastructure) over familial and cultural factors in determining the quality of schooling for primary school children in low-income countries. This effect is discussed in a classic study by Heyneman and Loxley (1983),

known as the H-L effect, wherein they compare data from twenty-nine high and low-income countries. They further report that 'the proportion of the explained achievement variance due to schools and teachers are 90 per cent in India' whereas for Australia, it is 22 per cent and 26 per cent for the Netherlands. Further, their finding— 'the poorer the national setting in economic terms, the more powerful the school effect', has several implications for investing in school education (Heyneman and Loxley, 1983.

Subsequent follow-up research argued for a fading H-L effect (Baker, et al., 2002). In the Indian context, this dramatic H-L effect was not replicated in follow-up studies that reported that both home-related and school-related factors contributed to students' learning achievement (Govinda and Verghese, 1993; Kingdon, 1998; Reddy, 2004). These researchers found that the school-related factors that impact children's learning levels are infrastructural facilities, instructional materials and textbooks, teacher quality, teaching practices, teacher commitment, Head Teacher leadership, teacher attendance and pupil-teacher ratio. However, follow-up studies by Heyneman, (2004) reveal that children from higher-educated families did considerably better in Europe but it was far less true in case of Thailand, Columbia, and India.

Thus, efforts such as changing curriculum, revamping textbooks, and the interventions targeted at more parental involvement and/or standalone interventions for improving quality have not proven to be sufficient. Textbooks have proven to be useful cultural artefacts to overworked and under-resourced teachers to actively engage in the social organisation of knowledge. However, if textbooks become the only resource for changing the quality of teaching-learning, without making investments in teacher education and empowerment of teachers, desired changes may not be possible (Batra, 2005).

The second set of studies draws attention to the interrelationship between teacher qualifications and experience and children's learning. It is argued that teacher qualifications are the 'most important determinant' of children's performance on learning achievement tests (Govinda and Verghese 1993; Kingdon, 1998). This holds significance in the Indian context, where teacher qualifications are lacking and para teachers are appointed in several states to make up for teacher shortages. In states like Karnataka, Meghalaya, Assam, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Odisha, Sikkim and West Bengal, nearly 38–40 per cent of teachers have only higher secondary qualifications or lesser (Calculated from U-DISE 2019–20, MoE, 2022). Further, the status and prestige of school teachers in society and the lower preference for school teaching as the profession also impact both the qualifications and long-term commitment to the profession. Interactions with urban

students entering teacher education programmes reveal that education is a 'fallback option' and the least favoured profession choice, and often a route to other career paths than school teaching (Batra 2005; Gulati, 2013). This concern with attracting the brightest and most talented to the profession has been reiterated across several committee and commission reports.

The third set of research evidence focuses on the pedagogical processes. Copying the textbook content by the teacher onto a blackboard, and the subsequent copying of this content by children in their notebook, followed by rote memorisation does not translate into conceptual knowledge development and engagement with ideas. Research shows that changes in classroom-based practices like explaining new concepts with pertinent examples, motivating children, allocation of homework and assignments and giving detailed feedback are the teaching-learning practices that improve children's learning levels (Govinda and Verghese, 1993).

The fourth set of arguments focuses on the linguistic schism between the teacher and the child, i.e., between home language and the language of teaching-learning, which impacts the quality of teaching-learning (Agnihotri, 2014). The fifth set of arguments revolves around constructs like teacher commitment, absenteeism (Kremer et al., 2005; Reddy, 2004), teacher de-motivation

(Ramachandran, 2005), performance and accountability. Research has pointed out that the time spent by the teacher on task, i.e., the time spent in class teaching, classroom management and discipline, and time spent on administrative and other duties defining the nature of teachers, work, often has the least focus on teaching-learning (Sankar and Linden, 2014). A critical point of this shift is that most teachers have internalised the notions of 'performance management' through a mapping of input-output, 'levels of performance' and 'forms of quality' (Ball, 2007; Subramanian, 2018).

Huge teacher vacancies, their employment across public and private schools, and the dominance of private players in pre-service teacher education add to this complexity. At present, there are about 97 lakh teachers in India (Table 1). About 4 lakh private schools in the country employ 40 lakh teaching staff. 80 per cent of these private schools are low-fee paying schools. The ratio of government institutions and private institutions in school education and teacher availability in them is skewed. 68 per cent of the country's children attend government schools. 74 per cent of the total number of schools are government or government-aided and employ 59 per cent of the total teachers. Most teachers are trained in private institutions as less than 9 per cent of teacher education institutions are government (MoE, 2022).

Table 1
Demographics of School Education

Management	Number of Schools		Enrolment		Teachers	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Government	10,32,570	68.04	1,309,31,634	49.50	49,38,868	50.98
Government aided	84,362	5.59	2,74,98,530	10.39	8,20,301	8.47
Private Recognised on Private Unaided	3,37,499	22.38	9,82,09,302	37.13	36,02,625	37.19
Others	53,277	3.54	78,88,109	2.98	3,25,783	3.36

(Source: MoE, 2022, UDISE+ 2019–2020)

The legacy of the teacher's systematic disempowerment, beset with confusions, tensions and complications about her place and role in education and society looms large over any educational reform or policy, including the NEP. It is amidst these complex realities that we need to examine how the NEP 2020 looks at the challenges involved in reforming the system with a focus on the teacher.

The Idea of a Teacher

The NEP 2020 brings back the focus on the 'teacher' and places the teacher at the 'heart of the learning process' and pays special attention to their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive working environments and service conditions. The policy commits to 'do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible' (MHRD, 2020: 38).

The lack of teacher commitment and belonging has been addressed by re-aligning the teacher-community relationship. It is articulated by hiring and deployment of teachers from local communities, voluntary work and one-on-one mentoring.

The linguistic schism between the home language of the child and the medium of instruction has been addressed by choosing the teacher from the 'local area'. Here local signifies several dimensions— geographical location, identity locations and familiarity with the local language(s). It aims to retain the teacher by providing them with local housing, increased housing allowances and incentives to teach in rural areas. The policy incentivises the deployment of teachers fluent in the local language to rural areas with high dropout rates that are 'currently facing acute shortage of quality teachers' (MHRD, 2020: 20).

Hiring teachers according to the home language of the learners is given preference in NEP, 2020. The policy stipulates that states may enter in to bilateral agreements to 'hire teachers in large numbers from each

other' to 'satisfy the three-language formula in their respective states' (MHRD, 2020: 13). This teacher, being a bearer of local language would fulfill different roles, which include making pedagogic plans and a print-rich environment, recognising local resources and materials such as local toys, folk songs and crafts for teaching. Therefore, the teacher is the main vehicle for making the minority language as the medium of instruction. It is expected that such a teacher would promote equity in multifarious dimensions such as access to schools, resources and indigenous and folk knowledge. These are expected to instil a sense of belonging and confidence among children.

Several dimensions of the community are mobilised in the policy. First, the community appears as an assemblage of the local, and unfractured by gender, caste, class and religion. Second, the community of people engaged in teaching includes the youth, the employed, the retired and a plethora of non-state actors. Third, the community is involved through the decentralised functions performed by the School Complex Management Committees. Fourth, the community is pulled into the teaching-learning of the school through the notion of volunteerism. Taken together, these dimensions aim to revive the community.

The policy articulates and recognises the socio-economic context of teachers' work, particularly in deprived areas and links it with incentives.

NEP 2020 simultaneously draws upon and deviates from the global teacher reform discourse despite the policy's placement in a wider neo-liberal frame. The global teacher reform discourse is increasingly focused on performance and competitive behaviour, '...judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions both material and symbolic', (Ball, 2003: 216). However, NEP's proposed 'conditional' incentives are based on the conditions of work and the learning needs of children. There has been an issue of teacher deployment in rural or geographically difficult areas and teachers' preference for urban areas that lead to further neglect. The policy recognises this disadvantage in teaching-learning conditions and addresses it through special allowances for those working in geographically tough areas, where teachers are needed more. The policy stipulates that 'regions of the country with large populations from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)' be declared as 'Special Education Zones (SEZs)' (MHRD, 2020: 26).

Secondly, the language of standards, performance appraisal and accountability is used to incentivise and recognise outstanding teachers (MHRDs, 2020: 22–23, 32). If we read these conceptual deployments with the policy's greater emphasis on output

than on input, insistence on learning outcomes, and recognise teachers for 'novel approaches to teaching that improve learning outcomes in their classrooms' (MHRD, 2020: 11, 21–22), it becomes evident that the new norms are not delinked from the global education policy discourse. What is interesting to note is how the goals of equity and the framework of new public management come together to reframe teachers' work.

Thirdly, promotions have hitherto been based on seniority and not on an 'appraisal'. Teacher performance is measured indirectly through the children's performance in the periodic National and State Assessment Surveys. But by suggesting the setting up of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST), NEP 2020 aims to standardise and visibilise teacher's labour and link it to learner performance. Teachers' performance cannot exist independent of the wider school education system.

PROFESSIONALISM

In the 1970s, the conception of a teacher as a professional became popular, concomitant to the imagination of a 'reflective practitioner' in Australia, a 'critical pedagogue' and a 'thinking intellectual' in the United States.

There are six frames within which teacher professionalism as conceptualised below.

1. **Professionalism as an effect:** According to the National Policy on Education 1986, professionalism needs to come out as a result of rigorous teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service. Professionalism, according to the NCFTE (NCTE, 2009) develops through reflective practice and engagement with a wide array of individuals, groups, practices and structures.

2. **Professionalism as consciousness and work ethic:** This referred to the consciousness of one's self-teaching as a learner and independent thinker (Yashpal Committee, 1993).

3. **Professionalism as efficacy:** It focuses on particular characteristics of teacher self-efficacy, primarily defined in psychological terms of student engagement and classroom management (Bandura, 1977; Deci, 1985; Schwartz, 2015)

4. **Accountability and engagement: with the community:** Teachers' professionalism may best be defined by teacher accountability and decreased social distance from the community.

5. **Trust, knowledge and competence:** Teacher professionalism is conceptualised in the vocabulary of trust, and the premise that teachers are competent to discern and make judgments about why, what and how to teach (Whitty, 2000).

6. **New Public Management (NPM) discourse:** It conceptualises professionalism in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, teacher accountability, monitoring

attendance and an outcome orientation (Verger et al., 2012).

Moving towards professionalising teachers' work, NEP 2020 focuses on instituting the standards of teachers' work and competencies, differently for each stage. This may include criteria for performance evaluation, making the subjective expectations less nebulous. However, there are concerns to be attended here. It is important to note that the standards must complement and carry forward the basics laid out in the Right to Education Act (Gazette of India, 2009). However, if teaching-learning becomes more characterised by a 'predefined set of professional standards of conduct and particularly prescriptive instructional resources, the profession may become more vulnerable to public criticism and frequently invasive external scrutiny' (Hargreaves et al., 2007). The Policy's Implementation Plan must deliberate on what frames of professionalism would be operationalised.

NEP 2020 asserts that quality is dependent on the teachers, who are 'at the heart of the learning process' and an avowal to 'do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible' (MHRD, 2020: 38). Restoration of trust is at the core of improvements in teacher development. Sadovnik and Giroux (1988) argues for an 'open' and 'discerning' pedagogy that assumes that teachers must have 'some control over the conditions of their pedagogical labour' to foster 'individual and social agency'. Academic labour flourishes when it is open to dialogue and recognises the teacher's work. It includes respect and consideration for the time and condition under which teachers must prepare lessons, conduct research, collaborate and engage valuable community resources. The most important challenge before the NEP's implementation is to accord teachers the dignity, service conditions, remuneration, academic autonomy and resources.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND CARE

In 2019–20, there were 3,36,970 vacancies in elementary schools and 5,06,740 total vacancies for school teachers (Ramachandran et al., 2020a). The maximum number of teacher vacancies exists in Bihar, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. These vacancies have to be filled by qualified teachers. In response to the longstanding teacher shortage, delineation of the appointment of teachers is one of the strengths of NEP 2020. It articulates the need to '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' (MHRD, 2020: 38). Firstly, it is envisaged that

bright students would be encouraged to join teacher preparation programmes by offering incentives and merit-based scholarships.

Second, NEP 2020 recommends simplification and transparency of the recruitment procedures, basing it on Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs), classroom demonstration and/or interviews and knowledge of the local language. It is stipulated that teachers would be hired in schools at the local level with a planned and considered sharing of teachers across schools (MHRD, 2020: 5).

Third, the policy recommends a proper procedure for recruitment and deployment of teachers, paying special attention to ensure that all schools have the required specialised subjects and subject teachers. The nuanced differentiation of recognition of a subject teacher is drawn from the demands of vocabulary, literacy, genres, purposes and aims that are specific to each discipline. The creation, evaluation and dissemination of knowledge in each discipline also follow its own distinct trajectories (Bussert-Webb, 2011).

Fourth, the policy acknowledges that frequent and 'excessive' transfers are deployed as a political tool and therefore, limits transfer accountability only to exceptional situations, through transparent systematic open online systems. Such steps aim to reassure teachers, reduce unrest and apprehensions and

lead to a continuity of relationships with students.

The leitmotif of the policy is the development of 'decent and pleasant service conditions' and 'caring and inclusive culture' by 'overhauling the service environment and culture of schools'. The policy articulates a vision for schools to become 'vibrant, caring, and inclusive communities of teachers, students, parents, principals, and other support staff' (MHRD, 2020: 21). This is visualised through 'community building', 'resource sharing' and relationships between teachers in school complexes so that no teacher feels isolated. The policy places teachers as participants in a community, as lifelong learners, invested in their students' learning (Ramachandran, 2020b).

The making of the communities of practice and care is indeed onerous. These communities are theoretically moored in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and 'ethic of care' or communities of care (Johnson and Gilligan, 1983, Sadovnik and Giroux, 1988). The implementation is tasked with creating environments that enable the flourishing of all participants in the school education system. For such a shift, strong political will and financial investments in the public education system is vital.

Conclusion

In this section, we conclude the paper by doing three things simultaneously.

These are: summarising the different theoretical frameworks discussed in the paper, juxtapose the discourse of NEP 2020 vis-a-vis these frameworks, and suggest certain issues and ways for consideration in the implementation of the policy.

We have argued that akin to the contemporary policy literature on the centrality of the school teachers to bring educational reforms, NEP 2020 also emphasises the significance of the school teachers in bringing a series of changes. To decipher the idea of the teacher in NEP 2020, the paper pays attention to four particular constructs in the policy, namely, language schism, community, incentivisation and performance. It talks about how these frames aim to address the concerns related to inequities and also overlap with the global education reform discourse. The paper spells out how NEP 2020 addresses concerns about working conditions and the pre-requisites for forming teachers as community of practice. The paper spells out how NEP 2020 responds to concerns about conditions of work and the pre-conditions needed to forge teachers as a community of practice.

To understand the idea of the teacher in NEP 2020, this paper deployed multiple frames of reference. The first one pertains to the significance of the teacher in the learning and capability development of children with a focus on the relative significance of the school-related factors vis-a-vis versus the influence of familial and cultural factors, teacher qualifications, pedagogic processes and the language used in the both classroom and child's home. The discussion about family and home in NEP 2020 largely pertains to the linguistic schism along with communication to the parents about the childs progress card, availability of the digital devices and home-schooling for learners with disabilities. The implementation plans of the policy need to recognise the multiple ways in which the social locations and power differential influence families, their interaction with schools and teachers and their influence on the learning of the students. Such a plan requires the institutionalisation of constant dialogue between schools, teachers and parents beyond parent-teacher meetings and school management committees. It would require mutual recognition of teachers and parents as repositories of knowledge and partners in the well-being of the child. As outlined before, NEP 2020 gives considerable emphasis on augmenting teacher qualifications and attracting the 'brightest' to join this profession. But this historically reiterated policy intent requires considerable political, financial and policy commitment to ensure the employment of teachers on professional terms to have secure livelihood and service conditions, charting a clear path of career development to make the profession aspirational and deployment of human resources in the school itself

that is complementary to teachers' role and work. The emerging political economy of private schools poses considerable challenges to such a vision.

The policy emphasises on 'holistic, integrated, enjoyable and engaging' curriculum and pedagogy but this is not attainable simply by reducing content, experiential learning and more subject choices. Whilst the NEP aptly draws the link between assessment and pedagogy from the socio-cultural theories of learning, it must be ensured that— (i) such assessment and pedagogy are adequately understood as teacher-driven and not adapted from a centralised model and/or dependent on external agencies ranging from NGOs, Corporate Social Responsibility to market and universities that lead to deskilling of teachers instead of scaffolding, (ii) assessment leads to pedagogy based on learners' needs, and (iii) teachers' time, work and labour in designing and undertaking these tasks are recognised. Importantly rather than being protean and invasive, school complexes can be built on communities of practise and non-hierarchical peer relationships for support. (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

The policy must be applauded for taking note of the linguistic schism between the teacher and the child and for entrusting the teacher to ensure significant space to the 'local' and 'minority' language to ensure learning and building confidence among students. But surely, such a mammoth task needs mobilisation of the various germane institutions to generate resources for such use. Further, policy implementation must recognise how English has become a mark of aspiration, social mobility, economic necessity and redefining the self needs recognition with its complex historical legacy and relationships with other Indian languages. And it is within the contours of this landscape that multilingualism has to find its voice(s).

Of the six frames of professionalism discussed in the paper, NEP 2020 seems to lean more towards professionalism as an effect of rigorous teacher education programmes; as efficacy couched in content of teacher characteristics and achievement; greater embeddedness and engagement with the local community and its way of life; and the New Public Management (NPM) discourse focused on efficiency, responsibilisation and accountability measured in terms of standards, learning outcomes and cost-effectiveness. To assign teachers a centrality in education and in students' learning and well-being, beyond more instrumental rationality and position, it is important that the other two frames of professionalism which focus on autonomy, criticality, reflection and trust emphasised in the recent policy texts and discourse on teacher education in India are accreted. A case in point could be the participation of the teacher to arrive

at measurable standards and criteria, both for students learning and teacher performance and appraisal.

The possibility of who a teacher can be in the reimagined 'democratic spaces' of the school must be carefully sifted from the cacophony created by global actors. In the 75th year of India's Independence, to decolonise India's education system, bring back the centrality of the teacher (*guru*) and claim its distinct status in the family of nations, we must realise that enslaved teachers cannot create autonomous learners who value freedom, equality and justice as the foundational core of Indian democracy.

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