Dinesh K. Yadav
dinesh246802@gmail.com

The Draft National Education Policy 2019
(Do we Really Learn from Past Experiences?)

Abstract

This article raises concern regarding lack of action on the recommendations of past policies and issues pertaining to teacher recruitment process. It presents recommendations of the draft NEP 2019 on some specific aspects on role of the teacher recruitment principles and procedures, professional and career development, their governance and management by the administration. It suggests developing a conducive school culture and environment, stressed on relieving teachers from non-teaching activities, emphasis on continuous professional development of teachers and career management to improve school education.

The National Education Policy 2019, which intends to bring broad reform in the field of education, was released for public scrutiny and feedback from June 1 to June 30, 2019 was extended to 31st July. It has presented a vision and plan of action to create a robust, sustainable, India-Centric Education keeping the global context in mind. The document is broadly divided into four parts and 23 chapters, which covers the issues ranging from school education, higher education, technology in education, vocational education, adult education, promotion of Indian languages, Rashtriya Shiksha Ayog, to the empirical aspect of policy implementation (addendum and appendices).

Chapter 'Five' of the policy document talks about issues related to school teachers. This chapter covers issues of teacher recruitment, deployment, school culture, professional development, career management and teacher education. It has been observed in the past that educational policy documents had given sound suggestions and recommendations to improve the educational system of the country, but either they could not be implemented in the same spirit as proposed or were unable to address the

issues effectively. One of the cited reasons of failure of the policies is not being rooted in contemporary contextual realities and examine whether this policy is not making the same mistakes analogous to the past policy documents. This paper has focussed, on whether the drafting committee has learnt from past failures of policies? Does the document reflect the pragmatic aspects of policy implementation?

This paper has critically examined some of the issues discussed under the 'Teachers' (School Education) section of the policy document. This analysis is based on analysing some of the recommendations in the light of past policies and the author's experience as a former government school teacher, who is aware of grassroot realities of some rural schools. The purpose of analysis is to provide feedback for more nuanced, specific and contextual plan of action for implementing the policy, keeping the multi-dimensional, structural, functional constraints of the education system in mind. It is also important to highlight some ground realities in their simple and straight form. It can provide a different perspective for deliberation on some issues from the teacher's view point, as the drafting committee which consulted

217 eminent experts from the field did not include a single teacher from the 80 lakh teachers working in schools in the country as reported by *First post* (Anurag Kundu, June 19, 2019).

Before proceeding to discuss the different aspect of 'teachers', a brief idea about a 'school complex' which has been repeatedly discussed in the draft is needed. The idea of 'teacher: as a change agent' revolves around the 'school complex' in the document. According to the draft document-

> Each school complex will be a semi-autonomous unit that will offer education from the
> Foundational stage (age 3-8 years) till Grade 12 (age 18). The complex will consist of one
> secondary school (covering Grades 9-12) and all the public schools in its neighborhood that offer education from pre-primary till Grade 8. All the schools that are part of a complex will be chosen due to their proximity to each other, forming a logical geographical group. The school complexes will also have pre-school centres/Anganwadis, vocational education facilities, an Adult Education Centre (AEC), etc. associated with them. (draft NEP 2019, p169)

> ......the size and composition of the school complexes can vary, but the grouping must ensure convenience of access for students and families, administrative ease for the State government, and a support system for teachers and principals.

When we closely look into the proposed structural and functional design of a school complex, it is similar in many aspects to BRC/CRCs envisaged in SSA. "...the role of BRC/CRC is a mixed set of academic, supervisory, managerial, networking and creative activities; it goes beyond routine monitoring and supervision work as it encompasses providing support to schools and teachers through teacher training and teacher mentoring for their professional growth, strengthening community school linkage, providing resource support and carrying out action research (Tara, Kumar, Ramaswamy, 2010)". The structures and functions of BRCs and CRCs were well defined, but hardly able to bring effective change in teachers' quality. The new idea proposed of 'School complex' which is vague in many aspects of teacher development. How would it lead to improvement in quality of teachers? We would also look into some of the recommendations for teachers, these at many places seem either oblivious to the on-ground factual realities and are hypothetical in nature.

The paper is divided into four sections broadly to evaluate some of the recommendations on 'Teachers' of the school section. The first section covers issues related to recruitment and deployment while the second section talks about recommendations on school culture and environment. In the third section there is discussion regarding Continuous Professional Development and the fourth section highlights some of the recommendations on career development.

Effective Teacher Recruitment and Deployment

a) **Scholarship:** The draft policy says Merit based scholarship would be provided to the students to attract brilliant students for the profession. This scholarship will be funded and established in collaboration with governments, colleges universities and philanthropic organisations. This is basically meant to achieve two targets; one to meet the local requirements of the students (language barrier in communication) and providing employment to the candidates from under privileged background especially girls'. There is ambiguity regarding funding of this kind of scholarship. Who will fund and in what proportion? As far as private players are concerned, why will they fund such kind of programmes. What will be the share of respective governments in funding? Where will these students be

trained? Will those colleges be different from the usual B.Ed. colleges or all normal colleges? On all these issues suggestions need to be more specific in terms of implementation rather than ideal assumptions.

b) **Selection Process:** The policy states Rigorous and exhaustive selection process will be used for transparent recruitment of teachers. Selection test will involve comprehensive TET as first screening test, and second screening will be for testing teacher aptitude. This would involve an interview and a short 5-7 minute teaching demonstration. This second screening would take place at the local BRC, or in case that is not possible, via a phone call and a demonstration video sent electronically. For subject teachers, a separate NTA subject score would be counted. NTA score and TETs would be compulsory for private schools too. (draft NEP 2019, PP.121-122).

Some critical points in this section are, who will conduct these transparent examinations? At the state level corruption has loomed over almost all the examinations? The interview part is also somewhat problematic in many ways? Who will be the examiner at the BRC level, whether he or she will be efficient enough to gauge the teaching ability of a candidate? With rampant nepotism, and corruption; sanctity of demonstrations and interviews are seriously questionable. Keeping corruption in mind the Indian government had banned interviews from January 1, 2016 for Group D, C and B non-gazette posts in the central government, (Indian Express, October 25, 2015). Teacher recruitment falls under Group C of recruitment. Is there any data which suggests that culture of shifarish (recommendation) or corruption has ended? If not stopped then how will recruitment be transparent or impartial? Keeping the ground realities in mind, it has to be more specific and elaborate on transparent recruitment.

c) **Pupil-Teachers Ratio:** The Policy has emphasized maintaining desired pupil teacher ratio for which it suggests that 'The practice of assigning teachers to individual schools based on overall student-teacher ratios will be replaced by a much more careful assignment system based on the educational needs of the children. Given that teachers can be shared across the school complex, this will not cost as much as it would have to fulfill PTR ratios in each subject at the level of individual schools' (NEP 2019).

One aspect of this is that government do not want to put emphasis on making individual schools capable of all resources in the schools. As for deployment of a teacher is concerned, there are some regions or schools which have surplus teachers while others have very few teachers (as accepted in the draft). The basic question is why is there an acutely distorted distribution of teachers? Corruption, political and bureaucratic interference and mismanagement by the state and administration are some of the common reasons cited. Considering the school complex as a unit to count PTR may be sound on paper, but it will seriously distort PTR at school level. Policy of exchange of teachers will erase the accountability of government/ administrators to ensure PTR at school level. Those who will pay bribe or have approach will attach themselves to the complex and may not reach school or may permanently stay in the school complex which might be better resourced. This is what is happening already in the form of schools having surplus teachers, except some cases where student enrolment declined sharply leading to surplus teachers mostly there are reason extraneous to education. Schools having more teachers will be converted to single or a few teachers school. The *ad-hoc* teachers will come to teach in the school periodically making the alternative to fulfill PTR at school

level to manipulate it at school complex level. This recommendation will seriously affect the deployment, PTR and teaching learning environment in schools, if it is implemented in the form suggested i.e. school complex as a unit to consider and ensure PTR among many schools.

d) **Rural Areas:**   The draft policy says incentives to teach in rural areas. These incentives will include, in particular, quality housing on or near the school premises, so that the frequent hurdles for teachers of procuring suitable housing close to schools in such areas are eliminated (NEP 2019). What mechanism will be adopted to implement this? Is the government going to develop teacher colonies? If they have to stay in the house of some villagers then HRA is already in the provision, what is new to the recommendation?

e) **In Service Training:** The draft policy suggests that in-service teacher training centres like the BRC, CRC, BITE, or DIET (recognised as CPD centre) that are associated with the school complex would have newly appointed teachers who will be inducted for professional development for two years. These two years would involved 80% workload compared to older teachers and collaborative learning (theoretical and practical aspects of teaching) in the school complex as well as training centres.

If the teachers are appointed according to the need of schools and only 80% workload will be given to them then, who will carry out the remaining 20% work? Will there be special mentors at schools and training centres to devise and facilitate programmes for such orientations? Do the teachers have enough free time to get involved and collaboratively work with the newly inducted teachers? If it is routine co-operative learning among new and old teachers then what is new in the proposal? There is need for operational reification of Continuous Professional Development programme with reference to two years induction programme of professional development.

In a similar kind of design and aspiration, it was recommended in NEP 1986 that 'each DIET was expected to adopt a part of the district as its "lab area" for direct work with schools' (Akai and Padma). The purpose was to select schools within the district for testing different ideas and solving problems of schools through theoretical brain-storming. These schools were supposed to serve as labs for teachers and educators to plan and test new ideas for how professional development of teachers. Is there any report which gives a clear picture of this noble-hypothetical idea would work ? During two years of pre-service training, I have never heard about it. Here, I would like to highlight that if we learn something from the failure of similar kind ideas in the policy we would have had a more serious comprehensive plan with action strategies to ensure Continuous Professional Development of teachers.

Conducive School Culture and Environment

a) **Infrastructure:** 'The draft policy says All schools will be provided with adequate physical infrastructure, facilities, and learning resources, either individually or within their school complex' (NPE 2019). The idea of having resource either in a school or jointly at the complex is problematic and impractical. It is not possible for a student of one school to go to another school for using the library, laboratory, playground, ICT facilities. Even though it is imagined that transport facility would be available within the complex, it won't be accessible to each schools easily. Beside who will be responsible for the trip. If the girls of the eighth standard are going for laboratory practice in the secondary school, even 3-4 kilometers away from then school and any misbehaviour takes place then who will take the responsibility? There are quite many possibilities where that either the teacher is beaten up by the community or suspended by the department among other outcomes. What about the time

involved in travelling from one place to another? Many other issues might make sharing of resources among schools difficult. There is one benefit in it that the government will not be blamed for not providing resources to every school.

b) **Caring and Inclusive School Culture:** Ideas suggested to make caring and inclusive school culture in the draft policy are superficial and requires serious rethinking. If also appears that ideas recommended in this context are contradictory in themselves. They are more didactic in nature rather concrete plans of action. At one place it is said that The School Management Committee (SMC) shall be sensitised about the need for creating a caring and inclusive school culture on a continuing basis and the officials of the will reorient Directorate of School Education (DSE) them about their functioning to support such a culture. This must be made explicit in their role expectations (NEP draft 2019, PP. 125-126). On the other hand the document itself has accepted that 'Over the past two decades, a large proportion of the socio-economic middle and upper middle class has moved its children to private schools. Thus, the parents of students in public schools are often those with relatively less political and economic influence - they have a smaller 'voice' in the socio-political sphere. This very unequal power equation also impacts the effectiveness of the SMCs and any other form of community engagement with the school. The DSEs across the States continue to manage and govern the schools, with only a secondary role to the SMCs' (Drfat NEP 2019, P. 172).

The question thus arises, how can the sensitisation of toothless SMCs create a caring environment in the school? Provision for training and sensitisation is already in practice. If the old sensitisation did not work then how will the new provide fruitful result?

c) **Relieving teachers from non- teaching activities:** The draft policy states 'Aside from the minimal Supreme Court directives related to election duty and conducting surveys, teachers will not be requested nor allowed to participate in any non-teaching activities during school hours that affect their capacities as teachers and for any non-teaching jobs at schools, staff must be deployed as needed and shared across the school complex' (NEP 2019 P.126). Analogous to this recommendation, there was one made in RTE 2009 'No teachers shall be deployed for any non-educational purpose other than the decennial population census, disaster relief duties or duties relating to election to the local authority or the State Legislature or Parliament, as the cases may be' (Chapter 4).

Here, I am going to narrate one incident where the officials went to the extent of registering FIR to get the non-teaching duties to be completed. In Amethi District of UP, in the month of June 2017, District Magistrate (DM) ordered the deployment of teachers for verification of ration cards. This task could be done efficiently by someone who knows individuals in the village like the local revenue officer but it was given to the teachers due to pressure from the government to complete the work. This can involve political and social pressure to register wrong information in the ration card at local level to get the benefits from the government for which some person might not be eligible. Though the Teacher Union opposed it but the order was not taken back by the DM. Due to protest some teachers did not join the duty, while others joined out of fear. BEOs of the blocks were ordered to register FIR against the teachers, who did not joining duty. Later teachers were released after filing a case in Allahabad High Court, which quashed the DM's order for duty and FIR.

I would like to highlight that though guidelines are present since for a long time in different policy documents that teachers should not be employed in non-teaching tasks, yet they continue to be involved on a large scale. Is there any specific mechanism given

in the draft policy to effectively implement this regulation? Is there anybody apart from courts where teachers can complain when they are given non-teaching duties? There is need for a concrete mechanism to solve the issue because the educational system is extremely hierarchal and teachers are at the lowest rung of the strata. This practice has been inherent in the system from pre-independence and continues to date.

Emphasis on Continuous Professional Development

Emphasis is given in the draft policy for continuous education of teachers and following a modular approach. Teachers must be given the opportunity to move vertically in the educational chain as academic coordinators or supervisors in their school, master trainers, educational administrators or even as faculty in teacher education institutions.

The Policy proposes various ways to ensure the professional development of teachers like teachers should be allowed to attend short certified modular courses to accumulate credit which can be transferred into professional degrees. It also suggests self directed personal development of teachers using ICT and online courses. It also lays down that at the school level the head teacher/principal is responsible for building strong in-school teacher development processes and supportive school culture. The principal or head teacher in return can get the support from the community within the school complex.

Career Management

a) **Tenure track system of hiring teachers:** The draft Policy recommends that a tenure track system of hiring teachers across all level of schools will be established. Under this provision, teachers will be kept on three year probation and performance assessment would lead to confirmation of the teacher. Multifactor examination of performance which include peer review, dedication and classroom evaluation through multiple sources like review of peers, supervisors, and parents, and evidence of work would be incorporated. The system must be professionally rigorous and fair (P. 130).

Keeping in mind the complexity of grassroot, realities sources through which feedback to take decision can be obtained is not likely to be honest. This feedback would most probably operate on the factor of socio-political-power of participants, bribe, corruption, sympathy and manipulation of evidence. The policy suggests that this will not only be used in confirmation from a probationary position, but for all kind of promotions and increment of salary. Let me make my point more clear; in case of power relation, if the candidate is from a socially and economically strong background then those who are giving feedback cannot write a negative feedback. If it is negative then they will have to be ready to bear the brunt. Money passed across for writing positive feedback is well known and used most commonly. This does not mean everyone is corrupt and will take money and give a wrong feedback but the possibility, is there we see that bribe and money is common to solve issues of the teacher at different levels. Why I say mention sympathy in the list is because peers/parents would not give a negative, comment except some exceptional cases like personal enmity or extreme rustic behaviour. They would not see any direct monetary benefit for themselves, but direct monetary loss for others. One such example is, when pupil teachers from B.Ed. and D.Ed. /BTC colleges were deployed, many time they did not come to schools but wrote reports. Their work was hardly satisfactory, but the feedback reported in most cases was excellent. It was possible due to sympathy or personal or social relations.

Another point is data manipulation,

Lakhs of students are passing every year from elementary schools without learning to read or write a sentence (ASER and NAS reports), but when you look into records of schools, you will see marks entered for every listed activity and tests prescribed. In most cases marks recorded are used for promotion of student from one class to another, which can be basically again manipulated. This does not mean, I am blaming teachers and all going that they manipulate data but that quality of data which is to be used for assessment needs to be analysed. Another example I will give for U-DISE data regarding construction of toilets. Though this data reports a high number, getting real data of functional toilet with water facility gives a totally different picture. So use of evidence of work (there is quite a high probability that evidence can be manipulated though work is not done) for decision making of performance needs to be thought out contextually with all nitty-gritty's and appropriate evidences.

b) **Professional progression via promotions and salary increases**

The draft policy has also emphasised that there will be merit-based promotion and increment in the salary and outstanding performers will be recognised and rewarded. 'Independent of the stage of school education they are currently engaged with, teachers will be able to progress within that stage via merit-based promotions and salary increases. The aim will be to have a clearly-defined promotion-and-salary ladder to mark milestones in professional development and accomplishment, and therefore continuous incentives for conducting outstanding work as a teacher' (Draft NEP 2019, P-131). Performance indicators like PINDICS (Performance Indicators for Elementary School Teachers developed by NCERT can be a useful document and can be used at the initial stage.

c) **Periodic (annual or higher frequency) Performance Appraisal of Teachers**:

The draft policy say that Each state would develop State Professional Standard for Teachers (SPST), coordinated by the SCERT. These standards would be framework as well as specific guidelines for teacher career management, professional development efforts, salary increase, promotion and other recognition. 'Promotions and salary increases will not occur based on the length of tenure or seniority, but only on the basis of such appraisal' (draft NEP 2019). SPST also include the guidelines regarding autonomy and empowerment of teachers along with fixing their accountability. According to the draft policy performance appraisal done in a hierarchal manner. Head teachers would do for teachers within the school, head of school complexes would assess the head teachers of schools, while BEO, and DEO would in return assess the head of school complexes. They policy says 'All appraisals will be based on carefully recorded multiple sources of evidence, comprising minimally of school visits, school records and classroom observations, peer review, and feedback on progress of students. The appraisal must be endorsed by the SMC' (Draft NEP, P. 132).

There are two aspects, one is autonomy and other is accountability. Though it is important to ensure the accountability of teachers, but what about the structural constraints in which teachers work. If accountability of teachers must be stringently ensured, what about the accountability of bureaucrats, policy makers and planners and the state itself? The big mess created in the system is by the other rather than teachers. This mess never allows conducive teaching-learning environment in the schools. Like textbooks are supposed to be given in April (at commencement of session), they are distributed up to October. Sometimes, some books even in November. Distribution of free-bees and involvement of lot of formalities and paper work, allotment of different kind of duties in non-teaching activities is not due

to the teachers. It is someone else who need to be accountable for it. Rampant corruption in the system is more from other ends than teachers. There is more pressure on schools for mantar.... records. Thus record keeping hardly serves any purpose except as tool of manipulation at different level which is basically burdening than unburdening. Is the teacher accountable for all it? An area of extreme distortion in deployment of teachers. Policy makers many times suggest the ideas that are hardly implementable, Ideas like multi grade teaching in the schools are not possible for students who require more individualized attention given their socio-economic condition? Multi grade teaching sends both teachers and student in despair and finally teacher is teacher held accountable for poor performance of students. If there is need for accountability, this must be specifically ensured for every participant in the system.

Coming to autonomy and empowerment of teachers. The basic question is who takes away the autonomy of teachers or is dis-empowering them? And in what form and how is it perpetuated? The NCF 2005 said:

> Currently, the system of administrative hierarchies and control, examinations, and centralised planning for curriculum reform, all constrain the autonomy of the headmaster and teacher. Even when there is curricular freedom, teachers do not feel confident that they can exercise it without being taken to task by the administration for doing things differently. It is therefore essential to enable and support them in exercising choice. As much as the classroom needs to nurture a democratic, flexible and accepting culture, so also the school institution and the bureaucratic structure need to do the same. Not only should the teacher receive orders and information, but equally the voice of the teacher should be heard by those higher up, who often take decisions that affect the immediate classroom life and culture in the school. (NCF 2005, page 98)

Giving power to the bureaucrats to conduct performance appraisals along with other powers, would seriously further hamper the autonomy of teachers (as they are already in a dominant position in the system). The situation is so frightening that when inspections happen in the schools many times teachers shiver and feel completely helpless. Along with that giving power to decide salary increments and promotions would seriously affect the power relation between bureaucrats and teachers.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, we have discussed some of the critical issues related to the teachers that require serious, elaborate deliberation especially on part of operationalisation of the recommendations keeping in mind the convoluted, complex and extremely stratified social system in which the education system operates. It also highlighted how things are being operated by the system on the ground which has led to the failure of policies framed to impact and change the education system. There are contradictions at some points like role of SMCs, talking about autonomy simultaneously giving more power to bureaucrats, where policy needs to take a clear stand, what it exactly proposes. One of the key features of document is that it has identified the problems rightly, but the recommendations to improve the system need to be concrete, elaborate and contextualised, learning from past policy, programmes, failures and successes in them and considering the existing ground realities.

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