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National Education Policy 2020: Role of Schools for Holistic Development of Children During the Foundation Years

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ABSTRACT

The early education of children provides a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Schools play a crucial role in the early formative years. In the present study efforts have been made to critically analyse the NEP 2020 using qualitative methods so as to understand the vision of the policy makers. The qualitative analysis of the views of Principals, taken through semi structured questions, highlighted that NEP 2020 is a comprehensive framework for development of Education in India. The education system needed is one wherein children learn how to learn, blooming into individuals with essential knowledge, life skills of the 21st century.

Keywords: Foundation Years, Contribution of Schools, Holistic Development, Life - Long Learning

Introduction

Education plays a very important role in the realization of the true potential of each human being. Quality education is required for nurturing responsible and capable citizens of the country. Early years of an individual's life are the most significant and impressionable years for holistic development laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning. These early years cater to the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional needs of children and provide a solid launch pad for continuous learning and wellbeing.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes holistic development which implies the development of cognitive, intellectual, physical, psychological, emotional as well as social abilities in children so that they become capable of facing the challenges of life. It includes the development of imagination, logical thinking, cognitive skills, creative skills, emotional skills and language skills (Sarkar, 2020). Children of the Foundational Years (between 3 to 8 years of age) includes children of Anganwadi/ pre-school/Balvatika (3-6 years age) and children of 6-8 years of age studying in classes 1 and 2. These years are the formative and most impressionable years in the life of a child. If the "foundational stage" collapses, then the entire system of learning and education is bound to collapse. For any building to stand tall and strong the foundation must be strong.

The present research study is an effort to understand how schools play a significant role in nurturing children into capable and responsible citizens. The deliberations by the speakers in the Two-Day National Conference on 'Strategies for Implementation of National Education Policy 2020 for Schools and Student Progression' organized by Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Noida, India on 22-23 December 2020 provided significant insights into the understanding of how schools can influence the development during the foundation years. This conference emphasized on the 'children of the foundational years' According to one of the panelists, Mr. Joji Paul, Principal, Benchmark International School, Tirur, Kerala, before the age of 6 years, about 85-90 % of the brain development occurs. A child who is well looked after and nurtured during childhood possesses a healthy brain that helps in his /her progress. But a child who is abused and not cared for by elders has a brain that is not properly developed. Mr. Paul said that early childcare and quality education are the basic building blocks for a child's life. Fear and anxiety affect the brain architecture of learning and memory and therefore should never be present in the education process. The researchers have tried to compile the contribution of thoughts by the panelists on the Role of Schools for the Holistic Development of Children during the Foundation Years.

Review of Related Literature

The studies done earlier by other educationists have been reviewed by the researchers:

Panigrahi in 2014 conducted a study using Descriptive survey method to analyze School Effectiveness at Primary Level of Education in Relation to Classroom Teaching. The objective was to "identify the more-effective and less-effective schools; to find out the differences between more-effective and less-effective schools in relation to physical facilities, Head-Master and Teachers' performance and Students' performance; to find out the relationship

between the school effectiveness and classroom teaching.” Randomly selected districts-Puri and Ganjam from where 27 more-effective and 35 less-effective primary schools were a part of the sample. Principals of the selected schools and 2 teachers (from those who were teaching in classes III, IV and V) from each school were selected to understand their teaching in the classroom. The results emphasized that schools which are less effective should be identified and provided with the necessary help to develop their physical facilities and other aspects to enhance the performance of students. Emphasis must be given to child-centred approach and activity-based learning to make the students “dynamic and active in the class”. All the schools must be equipped with appropriate teaching-learning materials. Orientation programmes for teachers should be organized regularly.

The effect of Constructivist Approach on Academic Achievement in relation to Intelligence of Elementary School Students in Biology was studied by **Sandhu in 2017**. Pretest – Posttest control group experimental design was adopted. The purposive sample included 120 students – 60 each in the control and the experimental group. The tools used were Criterion Test in Biology for the assessment of Academic Achievement; Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices and Modules for Implementing Constructivist Teaching Approach in Biology. The data collected was statistically analyzed and results highlighted that student taught by Constructivist Teaching Approach exhibited significantly higher levels of Academic Achievement in Biology as compared to those taught by the Traditional Method.

Research Questions

The study has been undertaken to probe the following research questions:

1. What does NEP 2020 say about Education during the foundation years?
2. How can Indian schools ensure overall holistic development of children?

Methodology:

The researchers adopted suitable methodology to find answers to the research questions. Focused group discussions, interviews and qualitative analysis of the responses formed the methodology used in the present study. National Education Policy 2020 was critically analyzed to understand the vision of the policy makers. The views of the principals on the role of schools were taken with the help of semi structured questions. The information collected was systematically and objectively analyzed.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the information collected through focused group discussions, interviews and analysis of NEP 2020, the researchers made concerted efforts to find answers to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What does NEP 2020 say about Education during the foundation years?

The National Education Policy 2020 approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020 is a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in India. NEP 2020 emphasizes that the Education system should be such that children develop real learning and learn how to learn.

The goal of Education is to develop good human beings - capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination and values. NEP 2020 emphasizes multidisciplinary and holistic education. There should be conceptual understanding and not the learning of facts. Children need to be trained in life skills like communication, cooperation, and teamwork. Teachers are the “heart of the learning process”. NEP 2020 mentions that 85% of the brain of a child develops before 6 years of age. It is very important that each child is provided with good quality early childhood care and education (ECCE). During this period children should be provided “flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity- based, and discovery-based learning about, e.g., 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. It also includes a focus on developing social capacities, sensitivity, good behaviour, courtesy, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation.” It also needs to be ensured that there is proper physical development cognitive development, socio-emotional development, ethical development, cultural development as well as the “development of communication and early language, literacy, and numeracy.” It needs to be ensured that the children are made proficient in reading, writing and numerical operations.

As per NEP 2020 attention needs to be paid to the nutrition, physical and mental health of the children to ensure optimal learning. There should be “competency-based learning and education”. Experiential learning through the integration of arts, sports, story- telling based pedagogy is required. The teachers must play a pivotal role in grooming the children in the foundational years for the holistic development and to inculcate skills and competencies in the children to make them future ready.

Research Question 2: How can Indian schools ensure overall holistic development of children?

Children receive formal education in schools. When children in their foundation years enter school, they face an environment that is quite different from their homes. The schools must adopt strategies to help children to gradually adjust to the new environment. The teachers should develop love for learning in children and ensure their holistic development. This was further reiterated by the keynote speaker Shri Anurag Tripathi, IRPS, Secretary, Central Board of Secondary Education. Only those teachers to be recruited who possess “good teaching skills, communication skills, are good in art integration, good

motivators and counsellors.” There must be enough qualified, well trained, and skilled teachers who should be regularly given the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills so as to educate the children of the 21st century.

Esteemed panelist Dr. Vijay Datta, Principal, Modern School, Barakhamba Road, Delhi said that during the foundation years children learn language quickly. This quality should be utilized in the learning of multiple languages. While teaching any language, initially more importance should be given to speaking and then later efforts should be made to teach the children how to write. He emphasized that the teachers and parents should not be in a rush to make the children write. They should be allowed to draw with a free hand. Before writing, the children should be educated about the sounds of alphabets.

Dr Datta further added that presently children were “glued to their mobile phones”. But in earlier times, children played with marbles and played hopscotch which helped in the development of good coordination between eyes and hands. These Indian traditional games should also find a place in children’s activities now also. The importance of play in the process of education was further emphasized by Ms. Jayshree Kad, Principal, Amity Global School, Noida. Children enjoy playing and therefore play should also be used for the learning of concepts. “Play helps the children to process the world around them.” Children should be engaged in different types of play like free play and teacher guided play. Ms. Kad said that during play children learn language, develop psychomotor skills, learn counting, develop social skills like cooperation, teamwork; strengthen relationship with others; develop thinking skills, self-management skills and communication skills.

In the words of Fr Sebastian James, Principal, St. Lawrence High School, Kolkata, whatever is learnt in the foundation years, stays for life. Social skills like empathy and teamwork are very important and should be developed during these foundation years. During the period of 3-8 years of age, reading, writing, basic mathematics are a must. Teachers should be creative and should make teaching interesting. There should be a flexible curriculum and discovery- based learning.

Mrs. Abha Anant, Principal, City Montessori School, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, was of the view that “the aspiration today is to become a global knowledge power.” This requires individuals who have the competencies to help in the achievement of this goal. The focus should be on the preparation of children for the future. Teachers should be properly trained to teach children of the foundation period. She added that children are the “most valuable resource” and therefore they should be nurtured properly.

To nurture the young minds, the schools need to provide fertile ground for the children to grow and develop in the best possible manner and realize their true potential. The students need to be engaged in different activities so that they develop their psychomotor activities like drawing, writing, playing, and making creative things. Children need to be involved in group activities so that they develop social skills like cooperation, teamwork, adjustment, decision-making and problem solving. The elementary stage of education is the time to start the process of making the students understand written as well as verbal communication. They must be educated in developing the habit of managing their own emotions as well as being empathetic to the feelings of others.

Shri Anurag Tripathi also emphasized that there must be a paradigm shift from rote memorization to competency- based education. The education should be such that makes the children capable of living a good life. When students step out of school, they should be competent enough to become employed. They should be capable of working in teams and communicating effectively with others. They should be able to solve problems and have leadership qualities, initiative, and creative skills. The children must be sensitive to the needs of the family and society.

The understanding that the children have developed needs to be assessed regularly to gain insight into the level of understanding that has been developed in the children and get feedback about the quality of pedagogy being used. The Principals during the NEP 2020 Conference emphasized that it is very important that formative assessment of the students should be done under Continuous and Comprehensive Examination.

Implications

The present study is of immense value for schools, all stakeholders, planners and administrators as its findings provide an in-depth knowledge about how schools should interact with the young minds of the foundation years to ensure that they bloom into individuals who are equipped with essential knowledge and life skills of the 21st century. It will guide the schools in devising appropriate strategies like role play, self-paced learning, development of curiosity and discovery- based learning to maximize the development of young minds. The teachers of the digital age must be co-learners and act as facilitators for optimizing the potential of the children who are in the foundation years. They themselves should be curious to learn and willing to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 mentions that all efforts should be made to actualize the full potential of children. They should attain foundational literacy, numeracy, reading ability, understanding of basic texts and ability to perform simple mathematical calculations. Rightly concluded by Shri Anurag Tripathi - Education is the tool which can solve all the problems of a nation. If a child is made into a good human being, his capacity building and holistic development is done then such a child will be able to give his maximum output to the nation. The aim of education is to create good citizens and ensure holistic development of all children. A competent and skilled child will be able to live a happy life and will also be useful for the nation.

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