Mitigating Student Attrition in the Implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP – 2020): Effective Strategies and Approaches"

[1]**Pawade I. D.**

Head, Department of Mathematics,

Shivramji Moghe College Kelapur (Pandharkawada),

Maharashtra [India].

Abstract:

The Indian government strives to expand educational access for all citizens, yet the persistent challenge of school dropout impedes the realization of educational equality. The implementation of the 'National Education Policy' (NEP – 2020) heralds transformative changes in India's education system, bridging the future with the past. Rooted in principles of activity, quality, and access, the NEP aims to provide primary and higher education in regional languages, fostering a connection with the diverse linguistic landscape of India. Recognizing education as an essential tool for a brighter future, this research delves into the significance of education in building social, familial respect, and distinct identities. With a focus on minimizing dropout rates, the paper aims to contribute to the scientific understanding of effective strategies within the new education policy, facilitating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape in India.

Keywords:

National Education Policy-2020, Dropout Children, Unified District Information System for Education, Higher education policy.

Introduction:

The Indian education system has adhered to traditional approaches and methodologies for over three decades, despite the transformative impact of technological advancements and the advent of the Internet globally. While the world has undergone significant changes, the educational structure in India remained largely unmodified. Previously guided by the directives of NEP 1986 and the RTE Act 2009, the educational system exhibited several shortcomings, hindering progress towards the goal of universal education.

In response to the deficiencies identified in the existing system, the Union Cabinet approved the new National Education Policy (NEP 2020) on July 29, 2020, under the chairmanship of Kasturirangan. Originally drafted in 1986 and revised in 1992, the National Education Policy underwent substantial revisions in 2020, aligning with the evolving needs and challenges of the education sector. Aimed at meeting the compulsory education requirements for national development, NEP 2020 envisions a paradigm shift, proposing an increase in public investment in education from 4.4% to 6% of India's GDP.

The policy aspires to positively impact the lives of over 290 million students, paving the way for significant advancements in the Indian education system. Implementing NEP 2020 is poised to elevate the country's education standards to international levels. However, challenges such as ensuring the availability of teaching resources and textbooks in regional languages, securing skilled teachers aligned with the philosophy of NEP 2020, and establishing effective coordination between state-run and private schools may pose obstacles in the long run.

A persistent issue in the Indian education landscape is the alarming rate of school dropouts, particularly in rural areas. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including inadequate transport facilities and the considerable distance between schools. The shortage of teachers is glaring, with 9 lakh primary-level teaching positions vacant, and in some cases, secondary schools are located over 20 kilometers away, discouraging attendance. This dropout rate, approximately 40%, is more pronounced among girls, as highlighted by a report from Human Rights Watch, indicating that over 91% of children in 188 countries, totaling more than 1.5 billion, are out of school.

Financial insecurity resulting from parents' unemployment further exacerbates the dropout issue, preventing children from returning to school. Discrimination against girls from marginalized groups, including Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims, also contributes to their high dropout rates. Boys often receive preferential treatment, while girls face discrimination from both teachers and peers.

The absence of subject-specific teachers in schools hampers the educational development of children, leaving them ill-equipped to pursue further studies after the eighth grade. Millions of school-going children fail to acquire fundamental math and language skills, contributing to the alarming rates of school dropout.

A recent report from 'The Unified District Information System for Education (U-DISE)' sheds light on the dropout rates in Indian schools, raising concerns about the overall efficacy of the education system. On average, out of an initial enrollment of 100 students, only 70 students progress to senior secondary education (12th standard). The dropout rates are particularly pronounced among Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, with only 61 out of 100 reaching Senior Secondary School (12th grade), the lowest among SC/ST/OBC/GEN communities. Similarly, among Scheduled Caste (SC) students, only 65 out of 100 reach Senior Secondary School, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Dropout Trends in the New Education Policy:

In most countries, sending children to school is a customary practice, with formal education typically commencing around the age of one. However, there are instances where children exhibit reluctance to attend school and seek alternatives. Notable figures such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are examples of individuals who chose to drop out of school. While millions of children drop out of school annually in countries like the United States, this trend is emerging in India as well.

Recent initiatives in India, such as holistic education and the Right to Education Act, have successfully ensured the enrollment of nearly all children in primary education. Despite this achievement, statistical data reveals a gradual decline in enrollment beyond primary classes. Although the Gross Enrolment Ratio for classes 6 to 8 stands at 91 percent, it decreases to 79.3 percent in classes 9 and 10, and further drops to 56.5 percent in classes 11 and 12. This indicates a significant number of children dropping out, particularly after class 5 and notably after class 8. The country currently grapples with approximately 20 million dropout children, prompting urgent measures to reintegrate them into the educational system under the new education policy.

The new education policy, with a targeted objective for the year 2030, aims to achieve a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio from preschool to the secondary level. Emphasizing holistic education, the policy underscores the

commitment to making concerted national efforts to provide comprehensive education to all children, spanning from pre-school to class XII.

The National Education Policy has outlined an ambitious target to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio to 40 percent by 2020, up from the current 25.8 percent. In a bid to support economically weaker students, plans include the construction of 8000 hostels. The proposal also entails opening 500-degree colleges in previous blocks. To address dropout issues, the focus is on strengthening school infrastructure, ensuring clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, boosting the confidence of female students, addressing the shortage of trained teachers, and rebuilding trust in government schools. The objective is to enhance learning levels through improved synergy between formal and informal education, involving community cooperation. Efforts will be directed at providing various facilities at the block level to ensure that no child in the district is deprived of education.

To combat school dropouts, the policy emphasizes two key steps. Firstly, there's a commitment to enhancing school infrastructure and ensuring a sufficient number of trained teachers at all levels. Additionally, efforts will be made to upgrade existing schools and establish new ones in underserved areas to restore credibility in government schools. Safe transportation and hostel facilities, especially for girls, will be provided to facilitate access to quality education. Collaborating with civil society, alternative and innovative education centers will be established to reintegrate children of migrant laborers and school dropouts into mainstream education.

Another crucial step involves tracking and continuously monitoring dropout students to bring them back to school and ensure their consistent attendance and academic progress. Improving infrastructure and attendance alone is not enough; the policy underscores the importance of making the curriculum interesting and relevant. This includes deploying teachers proficient in local languages in areas with high dropout rates.

The policy aims to broaden the scope of school education to ensure access for children from socio-economically backward groups. It introduces options for both formal and informal education, allowing students unable to attend school to pursue education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL). This approach aims to provide affordable and quality education to all students.

Enrollment and retention of children are central to the objectives of school education. The National Education Policy acknowledges the challenge of bringing back children who drop out prematurely, addressing key reasons such as lack of parental awareness, inadequate learning opportunities, disinterest in education, insufficient school infrastructure, and negative perceptions of government schools. The policy is committed to reducing dropout numbers and ensuring universal access to education, particularly focusing on states with the highest dropout rates like Jharkhand, Arunachal, Nagaland, and Bihar. At the national level, Uttar Pradesh ranks 18th in addressing these challenges.

One prevalent cause of school dropout is child abuse, and children often succumb to early addictions like alcohol, drugs, internet, and TV, leading to a disinterest in education. Academic struggles, especially in subjects like mathematics and English, contribute to dropout rates, and economic responsibilities force children to leave school prematurely in low-income households. Health issues also impede learning, and a prolonged illness may hinder a child's ability to attend school regularly.

Boredom with school, especially by the 9th and 10th grades, prompts some students to find it unappealing, leading to absenteeism and eventual dropout. Lack of interest in studies and school, regardless of the reason, poses significant challenges for parents. Implementing education in the mother tongue up to the eighth grade is proposed to foster a more thoughtful approach, shifting the focus from rote memorization to reading comprehension.

Ensuring quality education involves addressing disparities between private and government schools. Efforts to match primary school quality with private schools focus on improving facilities and the number of teachers. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has played a crucial role in achieving universal access to education, aligning with the Education Policy of 1986 and the Millennium Development Goals.

Maintaining educational quality requires acknowledging the diversity of school types. The perception that private schools provide superior education, leading to a decline in government school enrollment, is addressed in the National Education Policy-2020, which emphasizes revitalizing respect for teachers. The monotonous school environment, elder sibling care responsibilities, and the need to contribute to family livelihoods are additional factors contributing to student disengagement.

The present education system focuses on admission, evaluation, and certification, but the crucial aspect of teaching-learning is often neglected. The new education policy targets connecting dropout children with mainstream education, recognizing the need for a holistic approach beyond mere academic assessment. The policy aims to bridge the gap between school and society, involving parents in monitoring their child's progress, particularly among disadvantaged sections, to ensure access to quality education for all.

Higher Education Dropout Landscape:

A staggering one in every four students faces the reality of dropping out of their higher education pursuits, prompting a critical evaluation of the current dropout rates. Universities and schools are now engaged in profound self-reflection. In this context, how can individuals avoid becoming mere statistics? What measures can the vice president, faculty, and staff take to ensure student retention? Understanding why students initially enrolled but eventually dropped out is a crucial aspect of addressing this challenge.

The decision to walk away from higher education can stem from various reasons, making the academic journey a complex one. College life, especially in the first year, presents significant challenges in adapting to its expansive nature. Several factors contribute to higher education dropout, including:

- High tuition fees
- Academic unpreparedness
- Dissatisfaction with the college environment
- Choosing an incompatible course
- Academic struggles
- A discouraging or unsupportive atmosphere
- Conflict between academic pursuits and work and family commitments

Conclusion

The factors contributing to student dropout encompass both internal and external elements. Internally, issues such as weak academic abilities, low interest in schooling, and diminished student motivation play a role, while externally, economic circumstances, family backgrounds, social environments, school systems or policies, and overall school conditions contribute significantly. Addressing this challenge requires concerted efforts from state governments to ensure that all school-going children have access to quality and equitable education.

Interestingly, there is no gender inequality observed in dropout rates in India, as both boys and girls exhibit similar tendencies to leave school prematurely. However, among various communities, the tribal population faces the highest dropout rates. A critical step in addressing this challenge involves the continuous identification, enrollment, and education of migrant children.

To develop a more effective strategy for addressing the dropout issue, further research is imperative. Exploring inter-school and higher education policies aimed at reducing dropout rates and enhancing educational outcomes

will contribute to a more informed and impactful approach. Expanding scientific studies in this area will be instrumental in comprehensively addressing the complex challenges associated with student dropout.

Reference:

1) https://www.ndtv.com/education/with-nep-2020-government-plans-reduce-dropout-rate

2) https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059320304855

3) http://scert.cg.gov.in/pdf/researchpapers/studyreports/Consolidated%20Report%20June%202.

4) https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1744059

5)https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348095531_Policy_Strategies_for_Reducing_Drop_Out_Rate_in_Senior_High_Schools

6) https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/ReducingtheDropoutRate.pdf

7) http://s3-ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/ijmer/pdf/volume10/volume10-issue4(5)/22.pdf

8) https://ishiksha.net/new-education-policy/

9) https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/21582440221097378

10) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/dropout-of-students-engender-huge-ramifications-in-social-progress-of-new-india/