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Implementing National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Telangana State

Some Concerns and Challenges

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Implementing National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Telangana State: Some Concerns and Challenges*

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I Context

Education development in India has made rapid strides over period reflecting considerable achievement in basic indicators. But there are still shortages in terms of desired outcomes. In a federal structure like India, the progress, achievement or shortages in educational development at the national level is a reflection of situations in the states. When education was a state subject in the Indian Constitution, educational development in the states depended on education policy and resource allocation for the same at the state level. With the transfer of education into Concurrent subject list in 1976, the Union government attained certain leverage to influence the educational development across states through the national level policy formulation and financially supporting the states via centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) or other grants while implementing the policy. But, still, the state policy priorities, commitments and accordingly resource allocation determine the educational development in respective states in the country. Under such circumstances, there are considerable variations across states in respect of educational development depending on the state level conditions of policy implementation and resource allocation. The recent National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India has rightly assessed the problems, issues, and challenges with respect to educational development in the country, however its approach to and policy in addressing them appears to be challenging as the respective state governments have not been taken into confidence notwithstanding their role in implementing the policy.

In this backdrop, the present paper while critically looking into the recent National Educational Policy (NEP) of 2020, analysed the educational development in Telangana state and examined the process and challenges in implementing the NEP 2020 at all levels of education in the state.

II NEP 2020: Some Concerns

The National Education Policy (NEP) has been the most discussed policy document in recent times. Certain aspects related to school and higher education in the policy document attracted attention as they are incongruent with the objectives put forth. Despite proclaiming education as public good, enough measures have not been put in place to satisfy that.

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The policy though talks about Universalization of pre-school education through secondary level; it only intended to achieve the 100% GER. It emphasized on universal access which may ensure 100 percent enrolment but this itself may not translate into other components necessitating universalization in terms of attendance, retention and completion among all the eligible-age children and their transition through primary (or pre-school as envisaged in the NEP) to secondary level of education. Further the policy is not committed to universalization of (or in the least achieving 100% GER) *formal schooling* till secondary level. Even for achieving 100% GER, it has proposed multiple pathways like the open and distance learning programmes through the National or State institutes of open schooling (NIOS) and/or SIOS, other informal ways of learning as an alternative to formal schooling. These provisions may not be adequate to fulfill the right to education of the pre-school to secondary school-age children entitled to have such right under the Right to Education Act 2009, a constitutional obligation. The draft policy consisted of these provisions but the NEP official document remained silent on this. Secondly the NEP has abandoned the idea of Common School System and the Neighborhood Schools altogether from policy arena, which was historically conceived as a pathway towards national education system. It is a hard fact that despite such system being a part of the earlier policies a multi-track, hierarchical system of schools has emerged catering to different socio-economic groups thus becoming a source of inequalities in the society. It is evident that the school education system has moved far ahead of common school system but it is not irredeemable. All that is required is a radical shift towards it which the NEP has completely ignored.

There has not been any commitment to strengthening of public schools either. The policy has straight leeway to privatization of not only higher education but also school education. It has proposed to have freedom and autonomy in charging fee and is less restrictive in the conditions and flexibilities required for school establishment, all which are more advantageous for the private entrepreneurs. Although it has made cursory statement on curbing the commercialization, it has not elicited any mechanism for the same. The ‘not-for-profit’ private institutions is not innocent to its labelling but has all commercial elements embedded into it. It is a well-known fact that most private institutions and more so in the urban areas lack the requirements for a school establishment, like the land, playground, labs, class-rooms, qualified teachers, needed for holistic development of the children. Lack of proper ventilation and safety norms or emergency precautions is a common sight in schools located in high rise buildings and congested premises. Liberalizing the requirements for establishing (private) schools, along with the proposed twinning or pairing of public with private schools as proposed by the NEP would only have little headroom in improving the physical conditions or quality of teaching in school education system. From all the experience we have private schools are symbolic of ‘discipline and teaching learning process’ while they lack in qualified teachers, then would the public-school qualified teachers learn the discipline from them intended through twinning?

One of the other issues that attracted lot of debate is bundling of various social groups SCs/STs/OBCs and minorities into single categorization of socially economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). The alternative pathways proposed to formal schooling for these SEDGs can lead to continued segmentation in learning as each category is distinct in

their socio-economic and cultural conditions. The 'special education zones' proposed should at least take their special needs into cognizance in furthering their educational development.

'Functional cognitive systems' and the related 'growth of knowledge' underscores the importance of processes related to modes of communication and associated the social change with development of communication technologies (Goody, 1977; Goody and Watt, 1963). The language as the medium of instruction and communication gained lot of debate and discussion ever since the colonial government of India introduced modern education in the country which continued into the post-independence education policy. Once again the language issue is brought to the fore by the NEP 2020. Although the document emphasized on local or home language at the primary level, later-on statements from the Ministry de-emphasised it by the clause 'if or wherever possible'. A pragmatic route is to have the flexibility in choice of the medium of instruction along with other languages with a compulsion of both mother tongue as well as English considering the multi-lingual context of communities and the practical use of English. In case of three-language formula more emphasis, if not compulsion, of classical language especially the Sanskrit is somewhat enforcing in the new policy.

The proposed National Mission on universalising Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) for children by the time they complete 3rd class/grade, may meet the fate of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) if adequate mechanisms are not in place. As proposed in the NEP teachers with the support of peer-tutors and trained local volunteers need to accomplish the mission. The mechanism and motivating factor for those involved is a matter of concern given the experience of NLM. The intended mission of FLN requires one-to-one peer tutors. While a majority of the students are in such need, a minority of fellow students would not be able to provide them the required one-to-one tutoring. Engaging trained local volunteers maybe of limited use but it can be made effective with an incentive system consisting of both social recognition as well as economic payout built into it.

Most importantly, the policy document is silent on remedial teaching which is an important aspect of the teaching-learning and affects the classroom transactions. Its importance is not only in school education but also in higher education. Most of the higher education institutions in USA and Europe have arrangements for developmental education similar to the remedial education. In India, there has not been any such arrangement so far except for the UGC's scheme for SC, STs, OBCs and minorities category of students. Given the socio-economic divide such measures would contribute to levelling of outcomes in education.

With respect to higher education, NEP 2020 aims at increasing GER to 50% by 2035 with a system of holistic multidisciplinary education having multiple entry and exit options, consolidation of the higher education institution into optimally large and quality ones, and accordingly changing structure and framework of governance as it required. NEP 2020 aims to consolidate the HEIs which has both the advantages as well as repercussions. Reconciling between HEIs with very low or sub-optimal enrolment but serving the students in remote areas and/or economically or socially backward sections of the society as part of consolidation maybe a difficult task.

More importantly, the subject of education being part of the concurrent list, one would have expected both the Centre and State governments to have equal responsibility in educational development. Such responsibility is not only in policy making and implementation but also in funding it. Less than one-fourth (20 to 25%) of total public expenditure on education is contributed by the Centre, rest is mobilized by the state governments (Motkuri and Revathi, 2020b). Most of the education expenditure of the Union Govt. is spent on Central institutions especially at secondary (Jawahar Navodayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas) and higher (Central Universities, IITs, IIMs etc.) levels of education in the country. In higher education, the Centre funds both directly and through UGC, the central institutions of national importance (IITs, IIMs etc.) and Central Universities. For instance, of the total grants released to UGC, 95% are served to central universities and other institutions, only around 5% left to serve the state universities or colleges (Motkuri and Revathi, 2020b). The state institutions and universities are left to depend on state funds and they languish for lack of funds given the competing demands due to various developmental and welfare activities and commitments of state governments.

In the recent GST reforms, although percentage of states' share has increased in the transferable central pool of tax resources, the states are found to be net losers because all other sources or channels of central funding have been drastically cut down. In such a scenario it would be a gigantic task for the proposed Higher Education Grants Council to be distinct in disbursement of grants to the state level institutions/universities. Again, in raising the education expenditure to 6% of GDP, the share of the Central government is not clearly spelt out.

III Educational Development in Telangana: Progress, Issues and Challenges¹

Telangana is the youngest and one of the smaller states in India. It contributes to less than 3 per cent of total population in the country but more than 4.5 per cent of the country's GDP. The state per capita income is 1.7 times higher than that of national average. The performance of the state in some dimensions of development such as per capita income and economic growth seems to be impressive. Till the turn of the 21st Century, two Telugu states (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana as a combined one) were having dubious distinction of higher incidence of child labour and educationally deprived (% of out-of-school) children in India. However the two states have improved remarkably in terms of enrolment and attendance rates of school-age children since late 1990s (Motkuri, 2005a&b; 2008; 2016b). But in the dimensions of educational development, there are still certain concerns as this defines as well as functions as a determinant factor of the future workforce.

Adult Literacy

Telangana state is having literacy rate much lower than national average. The gap between the national average and that of state appears to be increasing in the second decade of 21st century. The literacy rate at 71.5 per cent in 2018-19 indicates that still more than one-quarter of population in the state remained illiterate. In contrast, Telangana state's performance in school attendance rate among the school and college age children (below 25 years of age) is much

¹ Major portion of this section is taken from another (Background) Paper of the same authors: ***Educational Development in Telangana State*** (see Motkuri and Revathi, 2020).

better during the last two decades compared to the national average. More than 95 per cent of children in this age group are attending schools in Telangana and hence literacy levels in the younger groups (<25 years age) would be much better in the state. But beyond this age, literacy rate in the state is affected by cumulative effect of historical neglect of primary education in the Nizam's Hyderabad state and in the united Andhra Pradesh till 1990s.

Educational development and literacy rate in the Hyderabad state before integration into Indian union was one of the lowest when compared to other princely states and provinces (Motkuri, 2016). The literacy rate in the Hyderabad state in the beginning of 20th century (i.e. in 1901) was around 3.0 per cent and it was less than 10 per cent² even by 1951. Most of the districts in Telangana region except Hyderabad, had literacy rate less than 8 per cent (Motkuri, 2017). The adult literacy rate (i.e. among 15 years and above age population) in Hyderabad state was 11.6 percent in 1951. This historical disadvantage of low literacy levels in Telangana region continued post-merging in the united Andhra Pradesh as well.

Therefore, the state of Telangana stands bottom in the ranking of the states by the status of literacy rate among the adult (15+ years of age) population. Similar is the case of residual state of Andhra Pradesh. Both the Telugu states' performance is poor and they are lagging behind even when compared to so-called BiMaRU (i.e. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) states. This is due to historical neglect of primary education in the united Andhra Pradesh for a long-time. Certain initiatives, however, since late 1980s throughout 1990s to recent period like Operation Black Board (OBB), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) have brought in some improvement. But they are not able to compensate the historical backlog of illiterate population in the Telangana state. What now really needed is the adult literacy and education programmes in the state. More than one-third of the state adult (15+age) population is illiterate. The situation in rural Telangana is even worse as nearly half of its adult (15+age) population in rural areas still remained non-literate. Adult literacy is a serious concern in the state and policy makers should pay attention to the same, initiate necessary action plan and interventions to address the illiteracy problem in the state.

The Govt of India's National Literacy Mission (NLM) launched in 1988 aiming at transforming 80 million adult non-literates in the 15-35 year age into literates and the recent recast of NLM as Sakshara Bharat that launched in 2009 appears to have not made much difference among adult non-literate population in the state. Despite the severity of the issues of non-literacy in the state in the context of emerging knowledge based economy and digitalization, serious policy level efforts are still missing in the state.

Most important is the disparities across population groups. The adult literacy rate across religious and social groups in India and Telangana shows that it is lower in the state across these groups when compared to the national average. In Telangana, by religion, it appeared to be relatively low among Hindus who consists of SCs and STs, when compared to Muslims and

² It is to be noted that this literacy rate was with reference to total population i.e. literates divided by total population. Technically, the denominator should be population of 5 years and above or more correctly that of 7 years and above age. When we consider the 5 years above population as denominator, the literacy rate in Hyderabad state was 10.7 per cent in 1951.

Christians. Social group disparity in adult literacy rate is observed to be very high in the state. It is lowest among STs who have less than half of its adult population as literates. When compared to the social category 'others', adult literacy among STs is 28.5 percentage points lower, for SCs it is 18.5 percentage points lower and for OBCs such difference is 13 percentage points. Therefore, the social group disparity appears to be very severe.

Current Attendance Rates

In respect of current attendance rates of school- and colleges-age population, the state of Telangana is doing better as compared to national average and perhaps many other states as well. Performance of Telangana state is unique in this regard and contrasting with that of its performance in adult literacy rate.

The current attendance rate indicates the strength and serving capacity of education system along with the performance in achieving the goals of universalisation elementary and secondary education. The current attendance rate by age-groups in the state is, 94.5% among the 5-9 years age children, 97.8% among 10-14 years age, 83.1% of 15-19 years age and 29.3% of 20-24 year age population, currently attending educational institutions (school or colleges) in 2017-18. Current attendance rates of school- and colleges-age population (i.e. 6-17 and 18-23 years age) in the state of Telangana shows that nearly 96 per cent school-age (6-17 years age) population in the state is currently attending educational institutions in 2017-18. These rates in Telangana state are higher than the national average.

It is however indicating a gap in achieving the constitutional mandate of free and compulsory education leading to universalised school attendance of 5-14 years age-group. There is a gap in achieving Universalisation of Primary, Elementary and Secondary schooling. Universalisation of primary and elementary schooling is constitutional mandate since independence, and subsequent Right to Education (RTE) 2009 has made education/schooling as a fundamental right of children among 6-14 years age. Universalisation of secondary education is the objective of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which was initiated in 2009 by Government of India and subsequently subsumed in Integrated Scheme for School Education (ISSE) which is also known Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan (SmSA).

The current attendance rates by religious and social groups indicates that there are certain differences across such groups and they increase with age-group. It is lowest among the ST children by social group and highest among the 'other' children. Although, the current attendance rates (5-9 years age-group) among ST children is significantly lower in Telangana state when compared all-India average for ST children, it is opposite among 10-14 and 15-19 years children.

Completion Rates by Levels of Education

As regards the completion rates by level of education Telangana state appears to be performing better than that of national average especially secondary and above levels of education. Not only elementary completion rate but also secondary and higher education completion rates among the adult (15+ age) population in the state are higher than national average. Nearly, 44 per cent adult population in the state had completed secondary and above

education levels in 2017-18. In respect of higher education, nearly 15 per cent adult population in the state are graduates (UG or PG). Further, nearly 46 per cent of college-age (18-23 Years age) population in the state is currently attending educational institutions (colleges). Same pattern can be observed across social and religious groups when the performance in the state of Telangana is compared with national average. The completion rates by levels of education across religious and social groups within the state of Telangana shows that there are certain differences across such groups and they increase level of education.

What is something, however, contrasting is that the overall mean years of schooling in Telangana is lower than that of all-India average. But across social and religious groups except STs, OBCs and Hindus, the mean years of schooling for all the other two social groups (SCs and 'others') along with the minority religious groups (Muslims, Christians and 'others') it is higher in Telangana when compared to that of all-India average.

School Education: Infrastructure

Telangana state is having a network of 40500 schools for elementary and secondary education (upto grade 10) and around 2500 junior colleges for higher secondary education (grade 11 and 12). While addressing the concerns of children belonging to various marginalised sections and backward classes in the state, there are state-run residential schools specially focused on serving these children. The ***Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society***³ (TSWREIS) is running 268 institutions with about 1.5 lakh students, providing quality education in English medium up to graduation for the children belonging to marginalised section of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the state. A large number of such institutions are focussing on girl children. There are also 179 institutions (residential) functioning under the ***Telangana Tribal Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society*** (TTWREIS which is known as Gurukulam) providing education to tribal children in the state. Similarly, for the children of other backward classes (OBCs) there are 226 residential educational institutions in Telangana state functioning under ***Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Telangana Backward Classes Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society*** (MJPTBCWREIS) that was established in 2012-13. Further, for minority children, there are more than 200 residential schools and colleges functioning under the ***Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society*** (TMREIS) which was established in 2014-15.

As U-DISE data for the state show, the total enrolment in these schools was around 48.2 lakh in elementary level (I-VIII), 16.2 lakh in secondary level (IX to XII). The number of teachers available for school education in the state are around 2.6 lakhs (both private and public). The teacher-pupil ratio (TPR) in the school education in Telangana state at 26 is within the limits of ideal ratio or the norm for TPR at 40. However, there are considerable number of schools with single teachers and schools (more than 50% of schools at primary level) where multi-grade teaching is taking place. Further, considerable proportion (35% in 2018) of schools especially in rural areas of the state have enrolment below the optimal level (say less than 60). In this regard, the government of Telangana has adopted a rationalisation process by closing down of such sub-optimal primary schools or merging them with the nearby ones. Further, although most of the government schools especial day-scholar ones, have qualified regular

³ under the Ministry of Welfare, Government of Telangana.

teachers, the government residential schools and private schools have teachers on contract basis and some of them may not be professionally qualified ones especially in the private schools.

There are certain lacunae in terms of facilities available in the schools. As the estimates of ASER 2018 show⁴, two-fifths of schools in rural areas do not have either drinking water facility or non-availability of water. In other words, only 57 per cent of schools in the state have availability of drinking water while 77 per cent of schools have usable toilets. Only 72 per cent of schools in the state have usable separate toilets for girls. Around 86 per cent of schools have electricity connection. In the times when information technology is being embedded with educational technology in pedagogy and teaching, more than 90 per cent of schools in the state do not have computers available for the use of children. Less than 60 per cent of the schools in the state have library in place and books for children's reading. In this regard, the government of Telangana has to pay attention to improve the conditions of and facilities of the schools in the state.

Higher and Technical Education

In terms of availability of colleges, state of Telangana appears to be one of the highest in India given the size of eligible population. As per the All India Status on Higher Education Report (AISHER) 2018-19 there are 24 universities and/or institutes of national importance, 1988 colleges (constituent, affiliated and/or recognised) and 503 standalone institutes in the state. More than 86 per cent of the colleges located in the state are privately managed, most of them (80% of total) are private un-aided colleges. They account for nearly the same percentage in enrolment. Recently private universities also have been established in the state.

A majority of the colleges are for general education (1468 colleges accounting for 73.5 per cent of the total in the state) but for professional and technical education, there 32 colleges imparting medical education in various systems of medicine, 77 related to pharmacy, 40 nursing colleges, 150 colleges of engineering and technology in the state of Telangana. What is noticeable in Telangana is the declining number of colleges imparting engineering and technology, 182 in 2015-16 to 150 in 2018-19.

The number of colleges per lakh eligible population (18 to 23 years age old) in the state is 50 and it is the second highest in India, next to Karnataka (53). The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in the state at 36 per cent is far higher than national average (26%) and little less than Kerala (37%). It is, however, one of the highest across states and UTs in India. But in terms of utilisation of the available colleges, the state of Telangana appears to be little lower than modest across states in India. The measure of enrolment per college in the state is 554 which is far below the national average and one of the lowest in India. Such a lower average enrolment per college must be due to large number of colleges available in the state.

⁴ See at: <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/English%20files/telangana.pdf>

Major Concerns: Quality and Privatisation

More than all these aspects the most intriguing aspect of education is the quality of education, learning outcomes. National Achievement Survey (NAS) of NCERT and ASER reports on learning levels of children in school education shows that substantially large proportion of children are not able to perform basic skills they supposed learn till their previous class. Telangana is one among those states which are lagging behind in this respect. ASER 2018 shows that only 27 per cent Standard III children in rural India could read the text of Standard II. The rest of 73 per cent of them could not read. For Telangana, it was only 17 per cent of the Standard III children could read and the rest 83 per cent could not read. Such a low learning level in the state of Telangana is one of the highest in India. Performance of students across public schools under different managements also vary. Performance of students in residential schools (TSWREIS and TWREIS) outpaces those in ZPSS and Ashram schools highlighting the importance of governance on quality (Revathi, Kamble and Naresh, 2020).

The NITI Ayog Report 2019 on School Education Quality Index (SEQI), recently released, indicates that Telangana is lagging behind wherein the performance of the state in this regard is lower than the national average. The SEQI is largely schooling outcomes based indexing and it consists of learning outcomes, access, equity, infrastructure along with governance aspects. Similarly, another report of NITI Ayog on Innovation index indicates that Telangana stands fourth on this index, largely because of its performance index. However, there is a huge gap in the score of the state standing third and the Telangana state which stands fourth. Further, in the dimension of enablers, the performance of the state especially in the sub-dimension of human capital its standing slipped to 7th among the Indian states. All that indicates that state needs to improve the quality of education. Amended Right to Education (RTE) Act made states to codify expected levels of learning.

In higher secondary and higher education it is even more, above 80 per cent. In the quality of education context, the employability of the educated and acquiring skill set at least appropriate to their level/grade/standard of education has also become a serious concern at the national level and across states including the state of Telangana.

Increasing privatization of education is another concern at the national level as well as across states in India in all the (school or higher) levels of education. As District Information on School Education (DISE) School Report Cards indicates more than half of the enrolment in school education in Telangana is in private schools in the state. Even rural areas it is high. As ASER 2018 shows nearly 41 per cent of school-going rural children of 6-14 years age in Telangana are attending private schools.

As already mentioned above, more than two-thirds of educational institutions and enrolment at higher levels of education in India are privately managed. In Telangana it is further higher, private share is more than 80 percent of institutions providing higher education and enrolment in higher education courses in the state. Monitoring the quality education provided or learning facilitated in these private educational institutions is critical for educational development of the state and a challenging one in the policy perspective.

In all, it is not only the quantitative expansion but also quality of education that needs a policy attention in the state. Unregulated privatisation of education and shrinking of public education system needs a serious rethinking and policy attention. More importantly the employability of the educated and acquiring skill set at least appropriate to their level/grade/standard of education is a concern.

IV Implementing NEP 2020 in Telangana State: Concerns and Challenges

Implementing the NEP 2020 in Telangana involves ensuring the universal access to pre-primary to higher secondary education in the state. The new pedagogical and curricular structure of NEP 2020 has underscored the critical aspect of pre-primary education (for 3.6 years of age children) which has been undermined in the country for a long.

Pre-primary and School Education

Regarding this pre-primary education, universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care and education is to be achieved by 2030. In this regard, more than 95 per cent of 3-6 years age children (rural areas) in the Telangana state (as per the estimates of ASER 2018) are enrolled either in ICDS/Anganwadi centres (AWCs), in institutions for pre-schooling or in any formal primary schools (govt. or private). But what percentage of them and to what extent they are imparted with pre-school curriculum (education) in these centres especially AWCs is a matter of concern. There are more than 35000 Anganwadi Centres across villages and habitations in the state and they are meant for providing all the ICDS or Anganwadi services. Although pre-school education (informal) is one among the six-component package of ICDS/Anganwadi services, it appears that pre-school component is little neglected across ICDS centres not only in Telangana state but also all over the country. Around 70 per cent of children of 3-years age, 50 per cent of 4-years age and 20 per cent of 5-years age are enrolled in Anganwadi Centres⁵. If these centres are not able to provide comprehensive pre-school education for the holistic development of children, they would be deprived of it.

Therefore, the mandate for the government of Telangana in implementing NEP 2020 is ensuring all the children in the age of 3 to 6 years not only access to pre-primary education but also to make them attend the same. It involves the implementation of National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPF-ECCE) Curriculum Framework across all the institutions (private and government including Anganwadi Centres) involving in imparting pre-primary education. Ensuring delivery of the services of pre-primary education for children in all these institutions with trained teachers and following norms would be a challenge. As a large chunk of children of pre-school age are enrolled in Anganwadi centres, training and capacity building of Anganwadi teachers along with equipping the centres with required materials is critical. Mobilisation of resources for these additional costs is another challenge for the state government. Further, the convergence across associated departments is also a major challenge as the planning and implementation of ECCE has to be

⁵ A large proportion of remaining children were attending institutions for pre-school (both Private and Govt.) or formal primary schools especially 5-year olds. Around 13% of 3-years age 2.5% of 4-years age and less than one percent of 5-year age children in the state were not any institutions.

carried out jointly by Ministries of Education, Health, Women & Child Development, and Tribal Affairs.

School Education

Telangana state is close to constitutional mandate of ensuring all the children of 6-14 years of age attend schools. Further, education is now a fundamental right of every child under Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009. Around 98 per cent of children in 6-14 years in the state are attending school. Yet there is a gap, two per cent of children in this age-group are still remained out of school. The state government has a greater responsibility to ensure that right of the every child in the state is realized by not only ensuring universal access itself but also attaining universal enrolment and attendance. Among the secondary school-age children (15-17 years of age) the attendance rates in the state are more than 90 per cent. It is higher than national average and perhaps many other states.

The mandate for the government of Telangana in implementing NEP 2020 is not only ensuring access to schooling along with attendance of all the children but also ensuring the delivery of quality education with improved learning-outcome to match with the expected outcome.

First of all, in spite of high attendance rates the over-age and under-age children in different levels of education and in different grades / classes of school education (primary to higher secondary) is more prevalent in the state. As a result the performance of Telangana state in the all India context in respect of net enrolment ratio (NER) by levels of school education (primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary) is little lagging behind when compared to its performance in respect of attendance rate among the children in the age group of 6-17 years which is appropriate for whole of school education. In this regard, streamlining enrolment and attendance of children in the state into the age-appropriate levels of education and age-appropriate classes should be the major concern.

Most importantly integrating the whole of the school education system in the state is the need of the hour. Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are among the very few states in India maintaining separate administrative structures for both school education upto low secondary and higher secondary (junior colleges) under collegiate education. Although the Telangana state has adopted the national strategy for school education i.e. ***Samagra Shiksha***, it is yet to integrate junior colleges with school education.

As NEP 2020 is concerned with the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), it is definitely an urgent and necessary prerequisite to learning in the state as well as at the national level. Quality of education is cause of concern in the country and in Telangana state (see Reddy, 2019). ASER and NAS reports have shown the learning deficit or learning poverty (in World Bank terminology) in the school education. Primary education is an indispensable foundation for next levels of education and lifelong learning. In this stage, child acquires basic skills in numeracy and the necessary ability to read and write. As the surveys indicate many children are not able to demonstrate expected levels of learning outcomes / grade level competencies. In this regard, while implementing the NEP 2020, the Govt. of India is going to

launch National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIP-RUN) in a mission mode.

It is important to identify and understand the extent of learning gaps and associated factors and to devise various strategies keeping in view the circumstances and diversities across districts in the state. Filling vacancies with qualified teachers is a part of the solution but beyond that the teachers' accountability and their training in accordance with requirement is critical in filling the gaps while attaining the expected learning outcomes. Two examples one can cite is the performance in this respect is the schools under TSWREIS⁶ in Telangana state and also the public schools in Delhi. Scaling up the model performance and achievement of TSWREIS in Telangana, covering all the public institutions, is a challenging task for the government but not impossible. Initiatives with no major budget implications like active involvement of various stakeholders especially the school management committees (SMCs), parents and community which is critical in monitoring and tracking the students' progress in achieving expected learning-outcomes, and the required training and awareness drives are noteworthy in this context.

To keep a regular check on education system, Govt. of India proposed in NEP 2020 to setup national assessment centre: Performance, Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH). Also the World Bank is initiating a project for the purpose: Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS). To tackle the learning losses due to school closures (like in the present Covid-19) or any emergency situation, the STARS project include a component: Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC). The government of Telangana can take lead in this respect with developing its own strategies for improving the quality of education.

Higher Education: General, Vocational, Technical and Professional

As the NEP 2020 aims, implementing the policy in the state involves achieving the target 50% GER by 2035 with institutional restructuring and consolidation (a minimum of 3000 enrolment in each HEI), and transforming the state higher education system into a new and forward looking one with quality universities and colleges during the period of next 15 years.

The GER for higher education in Telangana state at present is 36% which is ten percentage points higher than national average. It appears to be that the Telangana state has an advantage of easily achieving the NEP 2020 target of 50% GER earlier than other states. However, increasing privatization of higher education, as it is seen, in the state has imperative for increasing private expenditure which has implications for affordability that may slow down the growth in enrolment and GER. In a study such a deceleration in growth of enrolment at the national level is observed (see Motkuri and Revathi, 20 Oct. 2020).

Consolidating the higher education institutions is a very big challenge not only in Telangana state but also across the country. There are almost 2000 HEIs along with more than 500 standalone institutions (such as polytechnics, teacher training institutes, diploma course level pharmacy and nursing colleges etc.,) in Telangana state. Keeping existing HEIs as they are and

⁶ Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TSWREIS).

expanding their size to larger institutions, as envisaged in the policy, is not possible in near future. Many HEIs are sub-optimal in size and most of them do not have any prospects to grow large in size and the resources required. Further, almost 80% of HEIs in the state are under private management, in most of the cases each entity (institution) has different individuals, trusts or organisations that are managing them. Bringing them together is also a difficult task. Although the acquisition and merger of the individual HEIs (in terms of their management) is facilitated and made possible, most of them (HEIs) are functioning in different locations. A large proportion of HEIs in the state are concentrated in and around capital city of Hyderabad or other major cities and district headquarters, but they are not located in geographical proximity. Geographical compactness of each of large HEIs is the underlying principle of consolidation proposed in the NEP 2020. Hence, making each of consolidated institutions (by management) as a single large HEI in one place (geographical location), is not possible through this acquisition and/or merger. One strategy could be facilitating expansion of selected potential institutions by consolidation while withdrawing/closing down altogether the other institutions. Resources and catchment of closed institutions have to be diverted to those continue to exist. Here the geographical distribution of HEIs in the state would be another major concern in the process.

As NEP 2020 envisages consolidation is also involves with restructuring of the HEIs running a single programme, course or discipline institutions into multi-disciplinary ones along with restructuring of all these multi-disciplinary HEIs into universities of teaching and/or research and autonomous colleges. Except universities and some general education institutions (degree colleges) most of technical and professional HEIs in the state are specialized ones running single programmes. There are around 200 engineering colleges, 300 colleges for management courses, 200 B.Ed. colleges and 100 pharmacy colleges in the state. It may be said that nearly half of the HEIs in the state are of this nature (not of multi-disciplinary ones). Around 1050 are the degree colleges in the state, most of which run under-graduation programme with multiple courses in different disciplines (Science, Arts, Humanities and Computes). Most of colleges (HEIs) in the state are of affiliated nature.

First of all, the government of Telangana has to mull its efforts streaming the B.Ed. programme into four years programme and making it as a part of university system, as envisaged in the NEP 2020. It means that all the individual B.Ed. colleges in the state may have to be closed down and ensuring a smooth transition from the present two-year course into a four-year one during the next couple of years.

A thread connecting to the above is the setting up model Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) at least one for each district (as envisaged in the NEP 2020) and resource mobilization for the same is a great challenge in the state. There are 33 districts in the state and hence that many model MERUs are to be setup in principle. But how it is dealt with, whether the existing institutions/universities in a district would be converted into model MERU for the district or altogether a new one would be set-up is an issue to be thought over. Again in the process of conversion issues like the required resource mobilization, management of public sector or private, or in public-private partnership (PPP) mode would crop up. Leaving it to any private initiatives have repercussions for growing private expenditure on

education and affecting affordability especially in backward districts and for students belonging to economically backward classes in accessing educational opportunity in such premier institutions. Establishing so many model MERUs under public system would be burdensome for the state budget. Already existing higher education institutions under the public sector have been affected by financial crunch in state's higher education budget.

Financing Education

As the report of *Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education* that compiled by Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India, shows the expenditure on education in Telangana state comprises nearly 19.5 per cent of total budgeted expenditure of the state (Revenue Account) and 2.8 per cent of its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), for the year 2017-18. One must herein note that the report that is compiled by MoE (Govt. of India) covers more comprehensively all the expenditure on education across departments and ministries beyond the education department (see Motkuri and Revathi, Sep 2020).

To compare with the other south Indian states, Kerala (4.2% of GSDP, 23.6% of State Budget) and Tamil Nadu (3% of GSDP, 25% of state Budget) along with Maharashtra (30% and 3% respectively) appears to have a better resource allocation for education than that of Telangana. When budgets all the states are combined/aggregated (excluding Union Budget), the expenditure on education turns out to be 22.8% of total budget and 3.4% of GDP. Whereas at the national level, Centre (Union Govt.) and all the state governments together have spent 16% of the total budgeted expenditure of the country and 4.2% of GDP on education (see Motkuri and Revathi, Sep 2020).

The government of Telangana needs to increase its resources allocation for educational development in the state. The Kothari Commission recommendation of 6% of GDP to be spent on education is applicable at the national as well at state level. The achievement of Government of Telangana is short of even the half-way mark in reaching goal of 6%. In this regard, as a short-term strategy it may have to increase the expenditure on education to at least 4% of GDP.

V Concluding Remarks

This paper while analyzing the status of educational development in the Telangana state, critically examined the recent National Education Policy (2020) in general and its implementation process and challenges in the state of Telangana. The analysis brings out certain contradictions in the policy, issues and challenges in realizing aim of the policy. Overall, NEP 2020 although gauged to a greater extent the problems, issues, and challenges with respect educational development in the country, its approach and policy in addressing them would turns out to be challenging especially financial allocation.

The analysis also brings out the certain issues in different aspects of across levels of education system (pre-primary, school and higher education) and challenges while implementation of the policy (NEP 2020) in the Telanagana state. It is observed that the consolidation and restructuring of HEIs in the state along with setting of model MERUs would be a challenge in

the state. More importantly, the financial resources allocated to the education found to short of requirement and hence to be increased. It also brings forth the imperative to strengthening of public education system.

Further education being a concurrent subject in the Constitution, entailing equal responsibility of the Centre and States in realizing the policy vision and objectives, the NEP document though serves as a directive and not as an enforcing one, appears to be centralizing the regulation and control of education system especially in the realm of higher education. Centre should take equal responsibility in funding to take forward educational development in the country.

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