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NEP 2020 Implementation: Policy and Practices at Primary School Education in West Bengal

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Abstract: Any policy without practice is meaningless. Most recently NEP 2020 is being implemented in West Bengal. In the realm of Primary school education, it aims to properly standardise the education of West Bengal keeping in mind the mental and physical developmental stages of the children. NEP 2020 made so many provisions to reform the primary school education of the country. This paper deals with the NEP 2020 provisions for primary school education, and the practices that are going at the primary schools in West Bengal. The researchers here made Document Analysis on the policy document to find out the major policy provisions for primary education. 25 primary schools from the district of Bankura, Paschim Midnapore, Hooghly and Purba Bardhaman were surveyed and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was made with the teachers and the functionaries to discuss on the NEP 2020 implementation at primary schools in West Bengal. The policy provisions, problems and suggestions for proper implementation at primary schools in West Bengal were discussed with deep insight. The study is qualitative in nature. Document Analysis and Thematic analysis method was applied to find out the key provisions of the policy documents for primary school education. Major issues like infrastructure problems, lack of teachers, technological issues, curriculum and examination system were also discussed with insightful details. The probable ways to remedy the situation were also discussed.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Implementation, policy and practice, Primary School Education

Introduction: Primary education refers to the initial stage of formal education, typically provided to children between the ages of five and twelve(*What Is Primary Education? Meaning, Definition.*, n.d.).Primary school belongs to the early stage of NEP 2020 school education structure covering the last two years of foundation stage and the full preparatory stage. Whatever the children learn and progress in their future life, that help them to imbibe and grow with the thought process. Their future education is the manifestation and by-product of his foundational solidity. So primary education is very important stage of education for the children. Education policies made so many initiatives since ages to strengthen the primary education making it free, compulsory, unbiased, mother tongue instruction oriented etc. The latest education policy NEP 2020 dived more deep to make the foundation more reasonable. In NEP 2020 Foundational stage covers 3 years of Anganwadi and first 2 years of primary. According to NEP 2020 primary education covers last two years of foundational stage and the three years of preparatory stage. Research shows that 85% of brain development of the children done before 6 years old. NEP 2020 emphasised on the basic knowledge development of the children at primary education. So, the policy made so many provisions for the free and compulsory primary education and took initiatives to make the policy provisions into practice but in reality, there is a huge difference between the policy and the practice at implementation with so many problems faced by the teachers and functionaries. This paper tries to find out them through the primary and secondary data collected from internet sources and from the survey study made in Midnapore division and Burdwan division.

Rational of the Study: The main aim of NEP 2020 is to bring back the heritage of Indian education and culture, and develop the Indian education system at the top through the integration of technology and the present demand of the society. NEP 2020 recommends a lot of core priorities for primary education and the holistic development of the children. So, the rich basic education of the future citizen of the nation is urgent. At this juncture it is noteworthy to study what are the policy recommendations for primary education and what is the status of the infrastructure of the primary schools and the educational condition. So, this study aims to find the gap between the policy and practices of NEP 2020 at the initial implementation of NEP 2020 at primary school education in West Bengal.

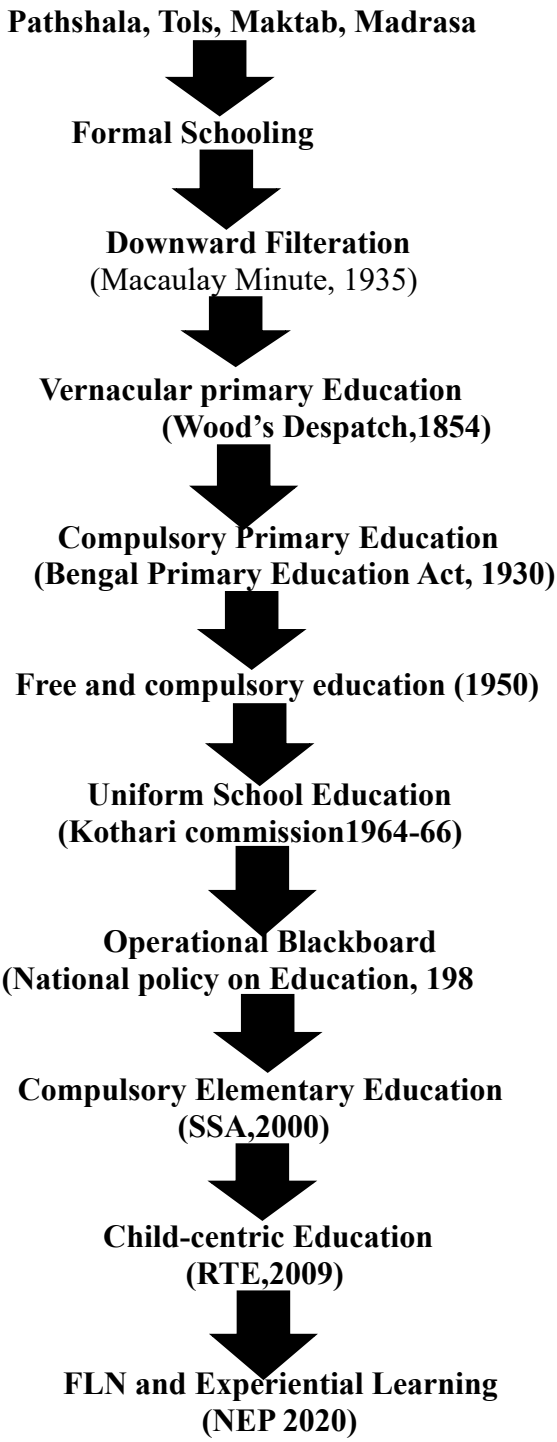
History Of Primary Education in India and West Bengal: Before the British era, West Bengal had indigenous education system. The indigenous institutions were categorised based on religion. Pathshalas, Tols and Chatuspaties for the Hindus and Maktabs and Madrasahs for the Muslims and they were all supported by the communities without any formal schooling.

In British colonial period Thomas Babington Macaulay prepared a colonial policy document named Macaulay's Minute (1935) for Westernization of Education through English-medium instruction that promoted "Downward Filtration" to educate the so-called high classes people rather than the mass education only to create the Indians who would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". The policy Wood's Despatch (1854),"Magna Carta of Indian education," recommended for vernacular primary schools, teacher training institutions, grants-in-aid and secular curricula. Through the Bengal Primary Education Act (1930) primary education got landmark legislation to expand compulsory primary education across the Bengal province.

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At Independence India started its educational journey in new rhythm with only 18% literacy rate of the country. In 1950 Primary education got Constitutional right for free and compulsory education. Kothari Commission (1964-66) recommended for uniform national school structure 10+2 and led to first National Policy on Education 1968. National Policy on Education in 1986 launched operational blackboard to develop primary school infrastructure and to expand primary school education. To achieve universal elementary education within specific age group of children, SSA 2000 mission was introduced. Free and compulsory elementary education got constitutional right through RTE Act 2009 under article 21A. In 2023 West Bengal started its own education policy as WBSEP 2023 with 5+4+2+2 school structure with special emphasis on pre-primary education. The most recent education policy that started its journey in West Bengal is this NEP 2020.



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Methodology: To conduct the present study, 25 primary schools from the districts of Bankura, Burdwan, Hooghly and Midnapore were surveyed and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with teachers and functionaries was conducted to discuss about the NEP 2020 provisions and the policy practices still done in the school education. The problems they face and the suggestions to overcome the issues were also discussed in insightful details. The study is mainly qualitative. With the discussion qualitative data is mainly collected. The NEP 2020 policy document was analysed with the help of Document Analysis method to find out the main components and the provisions for the primary school education. Thematic Analysis was also conducted to find out the gap between the policy provisions and practices running on in the schools. Related research articles were also studied in depth as secondary data.

Policy provisions for Primary Education: The NEP 2020 replaced the previous policy National Policy on Education (NPE 1986 that was revised in 1992 as Programme of Action) in 2020 and replaced 10+2 school education structure with 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure keeping in mind the physical and mental growth of the children. The key provisions of NEP 2020 for primary school educations are:

1.Stages of Primary Education: There are two stages for primary education-
A. Foundational Stage: This stage covers students of age group 3 years to 8 years. It combines 3 years of Early childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and first 2 years of primary school education, i.c. Grade 1 and Grade 2. Here the education is mainly play based and activity based rather than textbook memorization.
B. Preparatory Stage: This stage covers the students of age group 9 years to 12 years. The students of Grade 3 to 5 falls to this stage.
2.The core focuses
Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN): The main aim of NEP 2020 for primary education is to focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy of the primary school children with cognitive development and to ensure the desired level of literacy and numeracy of the children so that they can build a solid foundation for formal education for future endeavours.
Importance on Mother tongue/Local Language: Children can grasp any information if it is encoded in mother tongue or local language. It is generally stated that mother tongue is like maternal milk that is absorbed so easily. So, NEP 2020 emphasised the importance of mother tongue or local language for easy and healthy learning habit.
Experiential Learning: NEP 2020 focuses on reducing the rote learning and promoting experiential learning so that they can apply it in practical usage and they can make bridge between the theoretical content and practical application. So, NEP 2020 focuses on reducing the curriculum content and emphasises practical work.
Competency-Based Assessment: In the traditional assessment system memorisation was emphasised and the assessment system was designed accordingly. Though there were two types evaluation- Formative Evaluation and Summative evaluation, the emphasis was on summative evaluation. NEP 2020 emphasised on formative assessment and hands-on activity-based assessment to measure the competency of the learners on the specific field.
3.Equity and Inclusion: Equity and inclusion is not a new concept for the school education. NEP 2020 retain it and focuses on it to make it realistic.
4.Special Support: NEP 2020 is a uniform policy for the country. India is a land of diverse regional structure, race, language and culture and every specific regional has its unique demand. There are disadvantaged groups also based physical barriers, social barriers, economic barriers and location barriers. NEP 2020 provided importance on these issues and made strategy based on these issues to curb them.
5.Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR): The policy recommends for 30: 1 PTR for primary schools but for the disadvantaged area it is 25:1. In the district of Bankura there are some schools where there is single teacher per school.
6.Technology Integration: In the era of Technology, usage of Technology has been compulsory in the field of education. To make the lesson interesting, the usage of technology has been urgent as the minds of the children are attached with technology in the era of technology. So, the policy recommended for technology integration in education.
7.Free and compulsory Education: The policy recommends for free and compulsory for education with universal enrolment and access.

Key Policy Areas	Expected School Practices	Expected outcomes
5+3+3+4 Structure ECCE Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Universal access Free and Compulsory Education CPD training courses for teachers	Activity based learning Play-based learning Trained teachers Creative arts Story telling Games Mother tongue instruction Digital resources in Smart Classroom Adequate teachers and resources	Competency in FLN Holistic developments Critical thinking and creativity Inclusiveness and joyful learning Zero dropouts

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Recent Scenario of Primary Education:

Lack of teachers: In recent time all over West Bengal there is a huge shortage of teachers in primary schools, especially in disadvantaged area. In the district of Bankura there are few schools with single teachers. Most of the schools feel pressure to run the schools smoothly due to the lack of proper manpower. There are so many schools having 2 teachers – one functionary and one assistant teacher. According to NEP 2020 the PTR of the primary schools would be 25: 1 for the disadvantage area and for the general standard 30:1. Though there are low number of students in the school but for the rational point of view, it is difficult for a school to run with only two teachers to teach four classes. The last year of ECCE still belongs to primary school as pre-primary stage.

Lack of trained language teachers: NEP 2020 recommends for three language learning by the learners but there is no clear guideline for how. There is a lack of specific language teachers, specially trained language teachers in the schools.

Infrastructure deficiency: The infrastructure deficiency is a major issue to implement NEP 2020 at school education in West Bengal. Most of the schools doesn't have any computer or laptop to accomplish their daily official work. No primary schools have any smart class to offer the students technology-based education. Even some schools don't have premises wall to identify school boundary and to maintain school's safety and security.

Resistance to Change: Resistance to change is psychological issue that make a firewall to the teachers to accept the new policy by replacing the previous ones. The factors that work behind it are:

i. They have to adapt new teaching competency.

ii. They are well-aware about the existing syllabus and subject topic.

iii. They fear that they might not be able to learn the intended technology.

iv. They have to provide more time from their daily family life.

Lack of awareness: Though this policy came into focus in 2020 but still the teachers are not well-aware about the policy recommendations for primary school education. In the meantime, online training courses are done on DIKSHA platform. So, they have been aware of the very few recommendations. They somehow managed to complete 50 hours online CPD courses on DIKSHA platform. They were made well-aware about the rational of the training courses.

Non-teaching workload: The present scenario of the primary schools deviates the teachers from main focus to official or non-teaching activities and the non-teaching workloads are increasing day by day. Lack of adequate teacher and the non-teaching workloads hampers the main work of the teachers. BLO duty, CENSUS duty are the examples.

Non-efficiency in Technology: The usage of pen and paper is going to be out-dated in Digital India. Efficiency in technology is not only urgent for official work but also for NEP 2020 Implementation at School Education. But in recent scenario most of the teachers are not efficient in technology. The policy recommends for technology integration teaching- learning process but the teachers are not provided proper training to develop this skill.

Lack of proper Training: For the professional development of the teachers and functionaries online training has been conducted but they opine that they are not sufficient for the professional development of them. They face challenges like language problem, specific time limit, internet issues. So, the training courses have not much effect on them.

Traditional Teaching Method: Time goes on, policies are moving, so many initiatives come but there are so many teachers that remain sticks to their age-old lecture-based teaching method.

Curriculum: NEP 2020 is going to be implemented at school level in West Bengal and the curriculum is not changed still now. According to NEP 2020 the curriculum of the students should be reduced and practical or experiential learning should be emphasized. But the load of curriculum is still more for them and the curriculum content must be updated.

Rote memorization-based Examination: Rote learning education system still exists and the rote memorisation-based examination system is conducted for the students on specific time of the year, though the weightage of the questions is simplified.

Mid-Day-Meal Scheme: The teachers specially the HOI of the schools feel burden to run Mid-Day-Meal. They feel risk to do the management of the programme. It is observed that Mid-Day-Meal is much more inspected carefully than education. The budget allotted for the Mid-Day-Meal can't afford the price-hike of daily commodities. It affects their teaching learning activities.

Implementation Gap: From the above it is seen that that NEP 2020 made a lot of recommendations to reform the education system of West Bengal but the recent scenario of the school is not fit for it. So, there is a huge gap between the policy recommendation and the practices that are going on.

Discussion: From the above analysis it is seen that there is a huge gap between the policy recommendations and the practices going on at primary school education in West Bengal. There are so many issues that can restrict proper implementation of NEP 2020 at primary school level in West Bengal. Lack of proper infrastructure, shortage of teachers, digital divide, non-teaching workload, inefficiency in technology are the main issues for implementing NEP 2020. The fact is that in West Bengal NEP 2020

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is in initial stage to be implemented. Govt has already taken some initiative to upgrade the school condition. So, in future the schools will be in such educational atmosphere that the desired level of outcome will come through the policy implementation.

Suggestions: To narrow down the gap between the policy recommendations and policy practices there are some suggestions that came out from Focus Group Discussion with the teachers and functionaries. They are as below:

i.**Improvement of Manpower:** They opine that to implement any policy manpower is at the core. But most of the school lacks adequate teacher. In the district of Bankura the problem of teacher shortage is at high. So adequate teachers are needed for teaching-learning process and other non-teaching activities. They also suggest for minimum class-wise teacher. Special PTR guideline for rural and disadvantage school should be maintained.

ii.**Need of ICT instructor:** Most of the teachers are not well efficient in computer-based task that is to be performed for smooth running of the school activities. In NEP 2020 there is clear indication that teaching-learning activities to be delivered by integrating technology. So, they suggest to appoint at least 1 ICT per 5 schools.

iii. **Infrastructure Development:** Infrastructure development is very urgent issue for implementing NEP 2020 at primary education. Sufficient classroom, smart classroom, availability of proper internet, laptop or computer, boundary wall for school premises, adequate benches, hygienic latrine and bathroom, kitchen shed, playable playground etc. are pre-requisite condition of a good infrastructure of a school.

iv. **Reduction of Non-teaching Workload:** Now the teachers are not only teachers, they are to play multi-dimensional role in the school. They are to buy vegetable in the market, look after mid-day meal more carefully than the education of the children, BLO duty, Census duty for long period and what not. For performing all these duties their main work is neglected. They all want to get relief from those duties and want to discharge their energy fully for the classroom activities.

v.**Upgradation of Curriculum:** NEP 2020 recommended for the activity-based learning and to implement it, the weightage of the curriculum content must be reduced. Otherwise, it would be difficult to complete the syllabus and also the time will be less for experiential learning and competency-based learning.

vi.**Change in Examination System:** NEP 2020 recommends for competency-based assessment. The rote memorisation-based examination evaluates cognitive part of the students. Affective, psycho-motor and creative domain are not evaluated through this examination system. So, the competency-based assessment must be introduced and the teachers must be aware and trained for its implementation.

v.**Intregration of Value Education:** Lack of moral values for mankind is prevalent all over the world. In the context of India and West Bengal it is also found in the society. The respondents agree that the value education, and the impact of breaking the values should be taught through life skill education and proper curriculum integration. The respondents opined that the books of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and value-based stories for the primary school children are relevant in this regard.

Expected School Practices	Practices Running on	Suggestions
Activity based learning	Rote memorization is more than experiential learning	Adequate teacher
Play-based learning	Less teacher than needed	CPD courses for teachers both online and offline
Trained teachers	Ineffective online teacher training	Non-teaching workload to be reduces
Creative arts	Lack of digital resources	Adequate infrastructure and smart classroom
Story telling	Less emphasis on creative work	Trained language teachers
Games	Mostly traditional teaching method	Proper monitoring
Mother tongue instruction	Traditional examination system	
Digital resources in Smart Classroom		
Adequate teachers and resources		

Delimitation of the Study: This study has the following delimitations:

1. This study only focuses on the Govt-sponsored primary schools of West Bengal.
2. Only four districts- 2 from Midnapore division and 2 from Burdwan division has been surveyed.
3. This is a qualitative study based on Focused Group Discussion.
4. The data has been drawn from functionaries and teachers.

Conclusion: NEP 2020 is a very new policy in the context of West Bengal and it should be implemented in school education determining each and every aspect of the school**.** Teachers, parents and guardians must be made aware of the policy. Workshops and training must be organised to fulfil this need. Govt should keep track of the condition of the primary schools to find out difficulties they are facing in implementing NEP 2020 and provide sufficient resources in this regard. Though Govt has already made a list as PM Shree school to develop the infrastructure of the specific schools, Govt. should provide special emphasis on the rural and disadvantaged schools. NEP 2020 is a uniform policy for the country. So, while implementing this policy the regional condition and need of West Bengal must be kept in mind.

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