

Relevance of “Four Pillars of Education” Toward an Inclusive Society : National Education Policy 2020 Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose : Social structures like religious fanaticism, racial intolerance, gender inequality, and class and cultural disputes demonstrate that society does not truly practice equality, even though society is perceived as inclusive because people from all social classes reside there. The International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, often known as the Delors Report, looked at the “Four Pillars of Education” in an attempt to improve the educational environment of the 21st century. This study discussed the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in light of the “Four Pillars of Education.”

Design/Methodology/Approach : The study investigated the problems related to NEP 2020’s inclusivity from the standpoint of the “Four Pillars of Education.”

Findings : The study revealed that although the NEP 2020 did not specifically mention the “Four Pillars of Education” report, its recommendations, particularly the section on “inclusive education,” had similarities with the principles of the “Four Pillars of Education.”

Practical Implications : This study demonstrated, using a few NEP 2020 recommendations as a guide, how each of the four educational pillars upheld inclusive values and helped to build an inclusive society that protects each person’s rights regardless of their nationality, caste, creed, religion, class, gender, degree of education, or social standing.

Originality/Value : The four pillars of education and NEP 2020 were seldom mentioned in any literature.

Keywords : National Educational Policy (NEP), NEP 2020, Delors report, collaborative work, inclusive society, inclusive values, mutual harmony

JEL Classification Codes : I00, I310, I240, I280

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Though people in our society appear to be inclusive because they live in the same society regardless of their class, caste, religion, gender, level of education, or career, the truth is rather different. Living in the same place does not always imply cohabitation or peaceful coexistence. There is no need for research documents as our experience in everyday life in this society is enough to understand that social stratification somehow hinders the mobility of human relationships with one another. Thus, there is a discernible difference in

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how the rich and the poor are treated in our society. Although society is for the rich and the poor, and they live in the same society, there is a huge gap in their mutual harmony. Most of the people in our society live within their knowable community, and this community is often determined by their social, educational, or financial status. A similar thing is also found most often in the case of gender, religion, and caste. People from different religions and castes coexist in most regions of our society despite the fact that certain locations are particularly dominated or surrounded by one particular caste or community. But it does not mean everyone shares a harmonious relationship among different religions and castes. This is demonstrated by the instances of rioting among communities, unwelcome events brought about by religious or caste prejudice, brutal treatment of “Dalit” individuals, etc., in our culture.

In terms of gender-related issues, our culture does not have a distinct area that is reserved for men or women. However, many individuals in our society are concerned about male and female friendships (Mukherjee & Prasad, 2021). Many women still hesitate to sit near men as they are uncomfortable or afraid of men. Furthermore, it is regrettable that there are more and more instances of sexual assault and harassment every day. These incidents indicate that despite living in the same society, there is a gender gap between males and females per our societal tradition. Transgender people are most often ostracised from the mainstream of our society. Thus, gender inequality is vivid in the reception of transgender people in our society as well.

In the same way, orphan children, children without proper birth identity, children of single mothers, children of sex workers, etc., are also often more or less ill-treated by the other members of our society. People with physical deformities, dwarfs, and intellectually challenged people are also part of this society, and many people still treat them with sympathy, apathy, or antipathy. We are technically equal if our culture is like this, even though we live in the same society. Our relationship is not harmonious, which a society that values diversity demands. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (2020) emphasized inclusive education and focused on inclusive society :

While achieving an inclusive and equitable society where every citizen has the chance to dream, thrive, and contribute to the country is important in and of itself, inclusive and equitable education is also an essential goal in and of itself. (p. 24)

Additionally, each category has been specifically acknowledged in the policy as a component of inclusive education and inclusive society.

Socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor.

(NEP 2020, p. 24)

This inclusive society can be achieved by properly teaching the “Four Pillars of Education.” Learning the Treasure Within: The 1996 report, led by Mr. Delors, from the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century to UNESCO. Four pillars of education are: “learning to know,” “learning to do,” “learning to live together,” and “learning to be.” (Delors, 1996).

Essence of Inclusive Society with Reference to “Four Pillars of Education” : A Literature Review

The Delors Report, formally known as “Learning: The Treasure Within,” was published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1996. It was chaired by Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission, and aimed to outline a comprehensive vision for education in the 21st century. The report identified four pillars of education essential for the holistic development of individuals and societies. These pillars of education encompassed various aspects aimed at holistic development. *Learning to Know* emphasized acquiring knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking skills for lifelong learning. *Learning to Do* focused on practical skill development through hands-on experiences, including technical and vocational competencies. *Learning to Live Together* highlighted fostering social cohesion, intercultural understanding, and respect for diversity, promoting values like empathy and cooperation. Finally, *Learning to Be* emphasized holistic individual development, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, fostering creativity and personal autonomy for meaningful societal contribution. These four pillars serve as a framework for reorienting education systems to address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, including globalization, technological advancement, and social change.

In their enlightening occasional paper, Tawil and Cougoureux (2013) commended the Delors Report for its visionary recommendations, which, if earnestly implemented, held the promise of fostering a more just, inclusive, and sustainable societal future. This acknowledgment underscored the Delors Report's enduring relevance and potential impact in shaping educational policies and practices worldwide. Adding to the discourse on fostering peace and inclusivity, Scatolini et al. (2010) presented compelling modules designed to cultivate a mindset of “learning to live together.” Their innovative approach encompassed horizontal and vertical dimensions, addressing living together across space and advocating for eradicating racism, intolerance, and discrimination. By integrating civic responsibilities, democratic values, and human rights theory into the curriculum, these modules offered tangible strategies for promoting social cohesion and fostering a culture of inclusivity.

Building upon the foundational principles outlined in the Delors Report, Sengupta's (2017) doctoral thesis proposed a model of education grounded in Vivekananda's philosophy. Introducing five pillars for character formation, Sengupta advocated for cultivating inclusive values such as “Learning to live only for others” and “Learning to work together.” By prioritizing mental and social development, Sengupta's model offered a holistic approach to education that aligned with the pursuit of an inclusive society. Echoing the imperative of inclusivity, Singh and Bammi (2013) underscored the importance of gender parity in school education. Their research underscored the significance of addressing gender disparities to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all.

Furthermore, Singh (2013) emphasized the transformative role of education in transmitting not only information but also values. Inspired by the Indian concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (the world is one family), he advocated for an education system that instilled universal values and promoted a global mindset free from fear and fanaticism. This holistic approach to “learning to be” underscored the rich heritage of Indian knowledge and its potential to inspire a more inclusive and compassionate society.

To enhance teaching and learning environments, Choudhury (2016) suggested proactive engagement of students in the teaching-learning process as a means to foster a culture of research and effective learning in educational institutions. Choudhury (2016) advocated for a more dynamic and collaborative approach to education by empowering students to participate actively. The research has also illuminated how student conduct affects work engagement in learning environments (Khatri & Raina, 2019; Singh et al., 2014; Vashisht & Vashisht, 2020). Their study underscored the significance of addressing uncivil behavior within and outside the classroom boundaries to create conducive environments for teaching and learning.

Thus, these reports and several other policies and studies have proposed measures to foster an inclusive society. The promises made in policy documents and people's real experiences, however, continue to diverge noticeably. This discrepancy highlighted the necessity to assess how well these programs are able to close the gap between theoretical objectives and practical reality.

In academic circles, there is a wealth of research on the Delors Report and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020; nevertheless, these studies have frequently been carried out independently. By using Delors' four educational principles as a framework, this study looks at the NEP 2020 in an attempt to close this gap.

Objectives of the Study

The perspective paper seeks to analyze the NEP 2020 document, focusing on its measures aimed at fostering inclusivity within the education framework. Additionally, the study scrutinizes this document in reference to the Delors report, aiming to draw parallels between these two pivotal documents in educational history. The overarching goal is to contribute to the discourse surrounding inclusive education and societal inclusivity.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the inclusivity aspect of NEP 2020 through the lens of the “Four Pillars of Education.” It combines qualitative analysis to investigate how each pillar fosters inclusive values and contributes to societal inclusivity. Additionally, the study entails a comprehensive review of the NEP 2020 to explore its alignment with inclusive principles.

Promotion of Inclusivity Through “Four Pillars of Education” with Reference to NEP 2020

The principles of *Learning to Know* bypass the practices of “rote memorization.” It follows the inculcation of constructivism, where the learners are the constructors of their achieved knowledge. “Learning to know” is the key to “learning to learn.” This learning is guided by imaginary power, reasoning ability, problem-solving capacity, critical thinking, and memory power. It is a journey of discovery from start to finish. The students gain new knowledge. Thus, “learning to know” can be regarded as both a means and an end in learning itself and in life. It enables the learner to experience the pleasure of knowing, discovering, and understanding as a process (Nanzhao, 2006). The values of inclusivity and inclusive society can be taught through the proper formation of the curriculum. NEP 2020 has also emphasized the role of curriculum in this regard:

The school curriculum will include, early on, material on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It would also include more detailed knowledge of various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc., to sensitize and develop respect for diversity. Any biases and stereotypes in school curriculum will be removed, and more material will be included that is relevant and relatable to all communities.

(NEP 2020, p. 28)

Thus, through curricular content, the students will be able to learn about various cultures, religions, and so on, which promote inclusive values. An empathetic feeling will be developed for physically and intellectually challenged people, socio-economically backward people, etc. Thus, “Learning to know” may be one of the pillars of inclusive education and society.

After acquiring knowledge, the next step is to utilize that knowledge properly. *Learning to Do* helps to

strengthen social bonding, take social responsibilities, promote leadership skills by encouraging cooperative learning and collaborative learning, and develop the skills for vocational education, project-based work, and teamwork among the learners (Mukherjee & Singh, 2022). Competence is required over skill in “Learning to Do.”

Interpersonal relationships take precedence over technology in this context, and human traits are stressed more than materials. The ability to work cooperatively with others, aptitude for effective communication, social skills in forming meaningful interpersonal relationships, and flexibility to adjust to changes in both work and social life are all considered components of “learning to do” (Nanzhao, 2006). This spirit of teamwork creates an inclusive community where people work together to taste success collaboratively, keeping aside narrow thoughts regarding other castes, classes, religions, genders, or cultures. NEP 2020 also emphasized activity-based learning, collaborative learning, and vocational education. In this matter, NEP 2020 also focused on B.Ed. Programs also as this course prepares future teachers to raise the future nation.

All B.Ed. programs will include training in time-tested as well as the most recent techniques in pedagogy, including pedagogy with respect to foundational literacy and numeracy, multi-level teaching and evaluation, teaching children with disabilities, teaching children with special interests or talents, use of educational technology, and learner-centered and collaborative learning.

(NEP 2020, p. 23)

Any institution that values unity in teamwork will naturally embrace inclusivity. This opens the door for the students’ sociability. The invisible barrier (if any) between people will immediately become less visible when they labor together to realize a task, regardless of caste, creed, race, gender, or physical or mental disability. Thus derived from the first pillar to a certain extent, this second pillar itself unlocks the third pillar, which is the most desirable pillar of any society, i.e., *Learning to Live Together*.

Learning to Live Together helps people discover each other and understand others' emotions. People may segregate each other in the name of caste, religion, gender, race, etc., but at the end of the day, no person can live in a watertight compartment. If a person has to live in a society, she/he must obey the social rules. Here, the process of socialization is a must for a person's survival because no person can ultimately live in a homogeneous society. Even if a person does not interact with the members of each stratum of society, no one can ignore the fact that there is a symbiotic relationship among all the members of society. They may be directly or indirectly dependent on each other, but no one can discard the role of each stratum in making a society. Thus, despite creating knowable communities, everyone must live in a heterogeneous setup. Delors (1996) mentioned that “learning to live together” can be achieved through “developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence” (p. 97). The report also encourages “carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts,” and in this way, the third pillar of learning will enhance the essence of “pluralism, mutual understanding, and peace” in society. This is a journey of learning about other people's racial diversity, interdependence, empathy, and cooperative social behavior in sharing and caring; respect for other people, their cultures, and their value systems; the ability to interact with people and resolve conflicts through communication; and the competence to work toward shared goals (Nanzhao, 2006; Singh et al., 2021). If this can be actualized, the dream of an inclusive society, which is part of the agenda of NEP 2020, will also be fulfilled. One of the noblest mottos of NEP 2020 is to form an equitable and inclusive society.

Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. Inclusive and equitable education – while indeed an essential goal in its own right – is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive, and contribute to the nation.

(NEP 2020, p. 24)

Better learning outcomes and an improved reputation for Indian educational institutions will result from such inclusive education (Singh & Singh, 2021).

The ultimate pillar of education is *Learning to Be*, which is the main aim of achieving an education. This pillar is seen by Delors (1996) report as a more effective approach to growing one's personality and being able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility (p. 97). A person must first embrace the qualities of a decent person in order to participate actively in an inclusive society. Another report produced by UNESCO before the Delors report was released was the Faure report, also titled “Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow.” As stated in the Faure (1972) report:

The aim of development is the complete fulfillment, in all the richness of his personality, the complexity of his forms of expression and his various commitments – as individual, member of a family and of a community, citizen and producer, inventor of techniques and creative dreamer (p. 6).

The commission was concerned about the process of dehumanization, which was a potential threat to the upcoming century. In such a scenario, an inclusive society would be just a reverie. That is why both Faure Report (1972) and Delors Report (1996) emphasized “Learning to be.” A person who absorbs human lessons becomes empathetic to the suffering of others. The desire to help people comes from within them. As the rigid barriers of gender, class, caste, religion, and so on fall apart, everyone in the community comes together to create an inclusive society. NEP 2020 also seeks to unite all cultures—not only those of India but the entire world—by turning students into global citizens.

The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.

(NEP 2020, p. 6)

Conclusion

In the 21st century, the ideal society is both sustainable and welcoming to all people, regardless of their gender, race, nationality, class, caste, religion, or level of education. All human beings are equal in the eyes of the law. However, beyond these legal rights, legal equality will remain just theoretical until and unless society is not receptive to each other. Society cannot run smoothly and effectively if there is no symbiotic relationship between each other. Exclusion or ostracism will create a rift among people, which is the base of riots, unrest, or other violent activities. If these unpleasant things are to be controlled, people must develop a positive attitude toward each other. Only judiciary laws can stop these crimes alone. So, to make responsible citizens, we must prepare them from childhood. Curriculum and school activities can play a major role in forming these future citizens. Proper inculcation of the “Four Pillars of Education” can fulfill this motto, promoting inclusive values among the learners. NPE 2020 also envisions an inclusive and just society. The cooperation of all members of the society can ensure the long-cherished dream, i.e., the genesis of an inclusive society.

Managerial and Policy Implications

While the NEP document does not explicitly refer to the Delors report, it implicitly incorporates its foundational principles, the four pillars of education. The NEP outlines various strategies and methods to realize these pillars to cultivate responsible individuals. If the recommendations of NEP 2020 are earnestly implemented, our education system will undoubtedly foster confident, responsible, and productive individuals. This transformation will contribute to societal development and benefit the nation as a whole.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

This qualitative study primarily analyzes the content of the NEP 2020 documents to identify synchronization with the Delors report. Nonetheless, it is critical to recognize the shortcomings in the technique used for this investigation. Future research endeavors could focus on empirically testing the practical implementation of NEP 2020 within the teaching-learning process of the education system. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the policy in real-world educational settings, offering a deeper understanding of its impact and potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, investigating the perspectives and experiences of diverse stakeholders, such as educators, administrators, policymakers, and students, may enhance our comprehension of the obstacles and possibilities linked to the execution of the NEP 2020.

Authors' Contribution

Sumedha Mukherjee envisaged the idea and completed the preliminary writing. Dr. Shashi Singh further contributed to the paper by enriching the literature review from reputed sources.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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