

Curriculum Of Foundational Stage Education In India: Policy Inputs And Ideas

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ABSTRACT

In India the National education policy 1986 was created for the improvement of the total education system. Also, National Curriculum Framework, National Focus Group's Position Paper 2007, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 were interventions for implementing the policy effectively. Similarly, the NEP 2020 has been accompanied with NCF 2023. In this study the investigator tries to find the gap between the policy and practical implementation in respect of primary school curriculum of West Bengal. The main target group of this study are the age group of 6 to 8 years. The main intention of the investigator is to check components of the curriculum prescribed for 6 to 8 years' children and also correlate the same with the educational goals for the target group. Vital aspects of NCF 2023 need to be discussed and utilised.

INTRODUCTION

After independence of India several committees and commissions were formed for the development of education such as Mudaliar commission and the Kothari commission. The main purpose of these committees was to develop an education system suitably for an aspiring nation and taking it away from the Macaulay shadow. The idea of an emerging nation was formed, it was realised that lot of the input will have to come through the educational system. As our nation progressed, many specific bodies were formed for the improvement of various facets of Indian education such as curriculum formation, deciding the aims of education, teacher education, educational technology, and many others.

The education system of India was categorized as primary education, secondary Education, and higher Education. Kothari commission of 1964-66 discussed in detail on all categories of education, on the recommendation of this commission in the year 1968 the National Education Policy was formed. Then in the year 1986 the full and expanded National Education policy was formed. After that some other bodies were also formed to properly implement the national education policy such as National curriculum framework, National focus groups position paper 2007, Right of children to free and compulsory Education Act of 2009, RTE OF 2009 etc. The age group of primary school in India is basically 6 to 8 years, and according to psychologist Earnest Jones as well as Jean Piaget this the stage of early childhood. The basic needs of this stage are nutrition, safe secure shelter, love from family, opportunity for play and interaction.

The Indian 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 points out the curriculum and evaluation procedures of primary education. In the section 29, sub-section (2) of this act, it is said that the curriculum of primary education must follow the clause of 'all round development' of the child, then 'building up child's knowledge potential and talent', development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent. It also talks about 'learning through activities, discovery and exploration' in a child friendly and child centered manner, in another clause it stresses on making the 'child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the children express their views freely.'

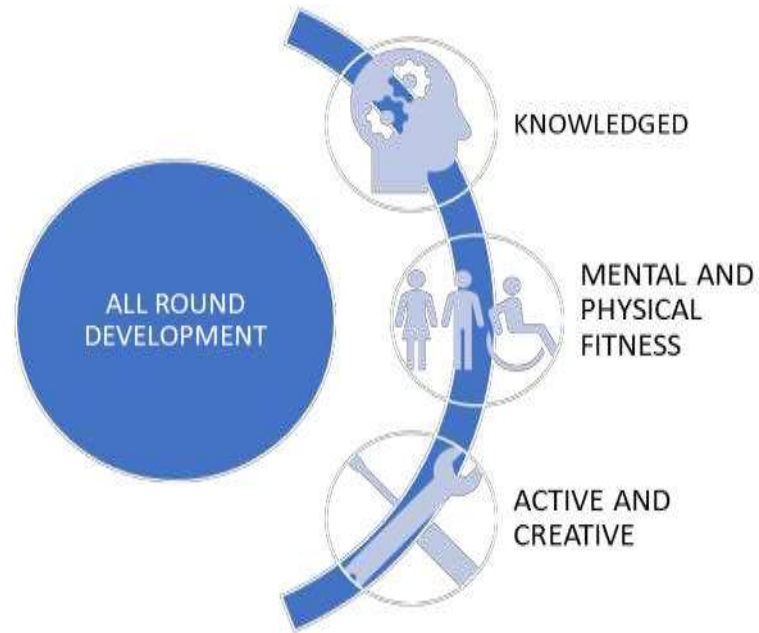


Figure -1

Figure 1 illustrates the representation of all-round development of children. The first aspect is knowledge, in this context, the NCF 2023 brings to light the steps of knowledge enumerated by ancient India. **The acquiring of knowledge, or Pramana**, is achieved through:

Pratyaksha - direct perception or firsthand experience, which engages a child's senses, interest and emotions (Anubhav) and leading to better memory and retrieval of knowledge at the right time (smriti)

Anumana - formulation of hypothesis or approximation through observation and secondary sources of knowledge, leading to a strong foundation in research, projects, and innovation

Upasana - analogies, comparisons, similes, metaphors are extremely useful for better understanding of complex concepts, which then become much easier for not just young children but senior students too. The use of techniques such as dramatization, simulation, kinaesthetic knowledge development can make education interesting and thus, something with permanence.

Atapattu - Circumstantial implications or logical reasoning, a vital aspect of knowledge building and decision making, logical reasoning should constantly be developed in the 917

classroom with the help of questioning, problem solving, group work, constructive dialogue.

Anupa Abdi - absence of an object or characteristic also creates a classification for a concept, students learn to identify and classify objects, phenomena, activities, and ideas.

Sabuda - precedence and expert opinions are also very important and they help in theory building for children. The students can and should be encouraged to study reference materials and the teachers facilitate to sift and summarise this knowledge and link it effectively to their previous knowledge and the present learning material.

The next aspect of all round development of children is

Mental and physical fitness - According to NCF 2023, The curriculum needs to follow the fivefold development or the Pancha kosha Vikas:

Annamaya kosha (physique)- Health is indeed wealth, and in the modern world, good health does lead to a better work productivity and better income and savings. Exercise and sports have to be inseparable parts of the curriculum.

Pranayama kosha (life force energy) - Students who are enthusiastic, cheerful, and positive are better performers in school as well as in life.

Mano maya kosha (mind wellness) - the emotional stability and balance of all human beings is an integral part of their professional and personal lives, indeed their very survival. If students are not encouraged to control their emotions, be it anger, sadness, distress, they will eventually become dysfunctional or problematic for society.

Vijnanamaya kosha (intellectual prowess) - intellectual development is something that we probably overemphasise in our education system, but this too is essential for the child to achieve success in life. But such prowess develops through superior focus, concentration, information processing for understanding and application, certainly not through rote memorisation. Teaching and evaluation procedures have to be developed keeping in mind the development of long-term memory and fast retrieval at the right time.

Anandamaya kosha (inner being) - A very important aspect of our personality is being able to withdraw our awareness from

the external circumstances of our life and know who we really are. This is not something we learn only as adults; we have to start young. Indian philosophy talks about the best knowledge developing when there is perfect alignment of the manas(heart), buddhi(intellect) and atman (conscience or soul). The joy of learning something new, the knowledge being its own reward makes for a citizen who is an asset to society as they are honest, selfless, and clear in their vision.

The third and an equally important aspect of all round development, according to NCF 2024 is

Active and creative students- Activity is the essence of knowledge development, as it improves learning processes, retention, and innovation. The following aspects are needed to be focused on, in the curriculum for encouraging creativity in students:

Play and exploration- the play way method is not just for very young children but also for older students, working on projects, simulation, gaming, dramatization they become naturally inclined towards creating new structures of knowledge.

Inquiry - inquiry is a process that starts with human curiosity and moves on to students asking questions. The teacher need not spoon feed readymade information, but be the facilitator towards students asking the right questions and trying to seek the answers.

Logical reasoning and problem solving - Once the students learn to ask questions, they will move on to reason out various aspects of a particular information in front of them, and solve simple to complex problems with confidence and conviction.

Discipline - the best creative ventures or problem solutions emerge out of sheer grit, determination and individuals need to be focused and disciplined towards their work to achieve that. This is a lesson that school systems need to constantly provide to students, though discipline does not mean stifling the natural energy and activity of the students, that would be like throwing the baby with the bath water. Discipline is best achieved through constructive dialogue, introspection, reflection, and presentation of the right role models in front of the students.

The Present Scenario in West Bengal

After a survey of a number of government schools of Kolkata and surrounding districts, it has been observed that the teachers are mainly emphasising on the theoretical part of the subjects, the practical aspects are occasionally covered or largely ignored. The students of primary school mainly learn the languages and grammar but do not have the scope of applying or using their knowledge of the language properly. They do learn to recite poetry, but that is a memory-based exercise, their creativity and confidence does not always come into play, as it would, if they were trained to use the dialogue of drama, learn how to tell, or write a story or how to be an anchor or host of a program.

A majority of the students in the primary education system of West Bengal, study only in the mother tongue which is Bengali or Hindi, and another second language as Bengali Hindi or English and they also learn about Bengali and English grammar, basic Mathematical calculation, Environmental Science and Physical Education. Some extracurricular activities are encouraged in a small number of schools, such as drawing, sewing, swimming, drama, karate etc. but such schools are miniscule in number. Many students do not even attend school regularly, or leave after their mid-day meals. Their approach to education is one of fear, compulsion, or indifference, instead of interest and enthusiasm. Thus, it can be concluded that primary government school students of West Bengal, are not being nurtured by the concept of 'all round development.' On discussion with the teachers, it was realised that teachers are always under pressure to complete the syllabus instead of focusing on the child's needs or personality.

What can be done according to NCF 2023?

BUILDING UP CHILD'S KNOWLEDGE

National curriculum framework fully supports the policy maker in the primary system of education regarding to building up the child's knowledge. There are various provisions in in the curriculum framework for the build up of knowledge of various subjects amongst primary school children. When it comes to subjects, students are learning two or three languages, fiction, non-fiction, and Poetry for

understanding literature, history of India, Indian geography, some basic environmental science, and basic mathematics.

But just having the right combination of subjects it does not ensure that all children are conceptually clear about their knowledge. By studying those subjects in their school, they are only coming to know about those subjects superficially, through their text books and teacher lectures. The learning outcomes not only stress on getting the information, but also for students to be able to exercise the knowledge properly in their day-to-day life. NEP talks about making “space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry based, discovery based, discussion based and analysis-based learning.” This will require

Children needing to chain their new experiences to their existing knowledge - It is important to structure and sequence of teaching of concepts appropriately, connect new knowledge to students’ existing knowledge and fitting new ideas to allow new experiences. Many studies have been conducted throughout the country to create easier scenarios for children to grasp and understand concepts. The concepts can be either presented to them as small packets one after the other, an improved version of programmed instruction (SCERT Tripura 2018) or various activities can be designed for them to help them link previous and present knowledge.

Providing the right environment - the right environment in the classroom and the institution involves facilitation and encouragement of innovative thinking, exploration, experimentation, discussion, group work and peer teaching. The classroom culture inculcates questioning, discussion, debate etc. as illustrated by the Kathopanishad. Technological tools can be used as enhancement strategies for research and referencing. The traditional teaching methods which do not provide for active involvement of the students lead to rote memorisation, as students do not get to create their unique knowledge structures. In an environment that’s fun and exciting, rather challenging activities will also be immensely enjoyed by the students.

Encouraging the right emotions - The classroom needs to have a feeling of comfort for the child which will make the child develop and display their knowledge. Children become distracted, passive, and disruptive when they are upset, angry, sad or in despair. The teacher needs to create

situations in the classroom that make the child feel and inculcate positive emotions like being joyful, grateful, peaceful, interested, hopeful, proud, amused, inspired, amazed and loving. All these emotions trigger very positive responses in children. Not just their behaviour towards the world, but their health too, improves as we see them happier, wholesome, and ready to face the harsh world with a smile. Small actions such as an encouraging word, a prize, a little praise can go a long way in creating and sustaining positive emotions and feelings in children. If they are encouraged to share their thoughts, their strengths are brought out, they utilise techniques such as play, simulation, storytelling, dramatizations it will create a beautiful world for them in the classroom. Such a classroom also makes them aware of the problems that they will face in the real world, and how to deal with them with the help of their learning with strength and courage, without losing their nerve.

BUILDING UP CHILD'S POTENTIAL

Each and every student at primary level is full of potentialities, the education system needs to help them express that potential. According to Swami Vivekananda all individual is full of potentialities. The policy maker is working towards revealing their potentiality of the students. National Curriculum Framework has some important pointers about how to reveal the potentiality of the student in the primary school. But sometimes, there is a huge gap between the curriculum maker and the teachers because schools are unclear about the intentions of the policy maker and the curriculum developer. In the primary system of education all children have different potentialities, but teachers do not always have a clear-cut idea how to reveal those abilities. NCF talks about problem solving approach, they should be presented with problem case studies from various walks of life and when teachers observe their reactions and solutions, their strengths get highlighted. They can also be made part of simulations, and that way, the children should get the freedom of learning. They must enjoy their school education, then their creativity will get reflected. Simulation exercises can initially be simple ones, the teacher may introduce games such as, Imagine

'I am a journalist' (talking with artificial camera),

'I am a ticketing officer' (issuing and checking the tickets),

'I am a postman' (knowing how the postal services work),

'I am a tailor' (basic knowledge of sewing),

'I am a referee of a football team' (expanding sports knowledge) etc.

The children become familiar with many professions, career avenues, they develop aspirations and ambitions by play-way method. They can then be motivated to unlock their potential and strive towards their chosen paths and excel in them.

Essentially, such activities create better information processing skills and attitudes in students so that they get better in:

Memory - Smriti, not to be confused with rote, but remembering associations, connections, deep processing for better concept attainment

Skills - Interesting exercises encourage practice and augmenting the strengths and potentialities of the child

values- Goal orientation and Hard work through Hatayama or stabilisation of the mind, a concept again from the ancient Indian Gurukul system:

Shama - calmness and patience is a quality rarely seen in today's generation, as they are gradually becoming more and more isolated and egocentric, in the name of competition the society encourages them to be ruthless and devoid of compassion

Dama- control over the senses, so as to not get distracted, again very important for the content addicted generation of today

Upreti- a form of renunciation, wherein we train students to renunciate instant gratification and learn the meaning of duty, which becomes difficult as the world lives by the pleasure principle

Titiksha - endurance and forbearance, wherein students learn to deal with failure, with pain, with loss, and take all in their stride to learn from errors

Shraddha - faith and trust in the teacher and one's peers is an important lesson today in the era where use of unfair means in examinations and submissions have been normalised

sadhana - focus and concentration towards learning outcomes and educational goals is something students have to start at a very early age, and the curriculum needs to create an environment where concentration building exercises are essential for every child.

Thus, the true potential of the child, when unlocked, can be the precursor for innovations in all areas of knowledge, and a citizen who is able to bring out his/her best in life.

BUILDING UP CHILD'S TALENT

The policy demands for exploring and strengthening the unique talents and abilities of the students in the primary schools. First and foremost, we need to understand the actual intention of the policy maker. The policy maker is talking about programmes, exhibitions, events etc. that can expose the talent of the student of primary level and the curriculum maker should follow the intention. Also, there has to be constant constructive engagement in the classroom between the teachers and the students which facilitates talent development. But there seems to be a gap between the thought of policy maker and the processes going on in the government schools of West Bengal. In the primary school level of West Bengal there are many talented children, the system needs to help and facilitate their expression. So, the National curriculum framework has provided some guidelines as to how that can be done. In his treatise, "Ways of the guru," Sri Aurobindo explains the concept of the teacher as an explorer of talent in every human. The Taittiriya Upanishad talks about the teacher as a guide, going through the following roles for the students to learn from:

teacher- A knowledge, skills, and interest facilitator

example- A model for the child to follow in terms of behaviour, discipline, sincerity

feedback- Helping students improve with positivity, encouragement, and correction

influence- A pathfinder for decision making, critical analysis skills and reflection for the students

The teachers may introduce some processes which are helpful to search the talents of the student. Some verbal and non-verbal activities, teachers constantly working with them to highlight their abilities, can work wonders to the psyche of

the students. It will help them get the shy, unsure children out of their shell, and this should become an integral part in the curriculum of the primary school.

There are sometimes gaps between the policy maker's vision, the curriculum developer's interpretation and mindset, and the understanding and capacity of the teacher to execute the focal points of the curriculum. It does not show the failure of the curriculum maker or the teacher, but the total education system does depend on this very delicate balance between the vision of the policy maker, the expertise of the curriculum developer and the dedication and hard work of the teachers, who actually have to understand and implement the curriculum among the students. To overcome the gap, a few very vital measures need to be taken:

SUGGESTIONS

- a) The **conceptual frameworks** must be same for all the executors i.e., the policy maker group, the curriculum maker group, and the teachers.
- b) They have to first study the aims of education for that particular age level, from there the **curricular outcomes** are formulated, and the most important aspect is classroom application. The NCF needs more **practical explanations** for the teachers, so that they are able to perform the classroom processes with planning and precision.
- c) **Proper assessment planning** is paramount, and that has to be again very carefully outlined. Assessment and evaluation are the major Achilles heel in implementing innovative strategies and curricula. The four steps that are diligently needed are:

Achievement of competencies and learning outcomes combining with curricular goals-

Formative and summative evaluation needs to not just look at rote memorisation, but whether skills, competencies and application of the subject matter is achieved. Other than the memory-based tests, tests need to be formulated on the basis of all domains of Bloom's taxonomy.

Constructive and developmental learning focused- students need to be capable of showing gradual transformative change in their personality and attitudes. Then and only then, evaluation can possibly make any sense, when we can actually identify the blooming of the child on multiple fronts.

Age and quality appropriate - Not every child has the same strengths and capabilities, so one shoe indeed does not fit all. Multiple tests may be designed keeping in mind the specific characteristics and abilities of the children. Classroom activities, written as well as oral, can become part and parcel of their evaluation process. Group work, projects where they are working together as teams, improve both their knowledge and personality. Not just that, students can learn to help each other, care for others, and share their knowledge with others. Indian Philosophy stresses on the idea that knowledge is the only wealth that keeps on increasing as much as we share.

Timely and credible feedback- Error free learning and constructive evaluation can take place if students keep getting to know their path and their direction as they progress with their studies. The feedback need not be constantly stressful as it becomes due to the constant pressure of unit tests in schools. Young children need not be evaluated with long exams, but interesting competitions and fun testing. With games, drawing, craft, fieldwork etc can be very effective tools for evaluating young children without stressing them out.

- d) The policy makers and the curriculum makers need to work as teams, constantly collaborating with each other through discussions and workshops
- e) The body of the policy maker and curriculum maker must exchange their views to each other at every step of the work. Otherwise, there will be wastage of time and resources, wrong decisions will not be corrected at an early stage.
- f) At the policy making and curriculum development stage, regular consultations and symposia are to be conducted with the teachers, thus always having a healthy exchange of ideas with the teachers and amongst the various groups of teachers, to formulate curricula that work at national as well as at very local levels.
- g) The policy and curriculum designing bodies must include the teachers of that particular level of education.
- h) Policy and curriculum development teams for development of education in the country must include social reformers, spiritual scholars, economists, scientists, and artists who can provide multiple perspectives on all round development of students. They can properly guide the entire formulation of the policy and its implementation. It is imperative that we address every level of learning, and also

talk about optimal utilisation of resources in the educational system, as in the long run, the country's industry, culture, innovation, infrastructure, sports, health is dependent on what goes on in the country's classrooms.

As a conclusion, one might say that the NCF 2023 is a comprehensive set of guidelines presented in an easy-to-understand format, though constant upgradation and transformations will be needed as new technology, knowledge and perspectives get researched and developed.

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