

Key Challenges and the Way Forward for achieving the NEP 2020 and SDG-4 targets in India

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Abstract

In India, New Education Policy have been introduced in the year 2020 that has introduced remarkable changes in India Education System. Few years back in 2015, Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by Global community including India of which SDG-4 pertains to quality education and comprises of 10 targets. However, there is a need to understand the key challenges in implementing NEP 2020 recommendations and achieving SDG-4 targets. An attempt is being made to highlight key constraints and list out suggestions/way forward required to effectively introduce strategies for ensuring SDG targets.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, SDG-4, Education, Teacher, Awareness, New Education Policy 2020, NEP 2020

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Introduction

Since independence, there are series of changes in education sector and national and international bodies are striving towards improving the literacy rate among population so that people's standard of living could be improved leading to overall growth of the nations.

In India, the current education system comprises of mix of government and private institutions that provide education either based on the fixed curriculum set by the various boards such as State board, CBSE, Central Universities, or by Autonomous institutions.

As per the Indian Constitution, education is in the concurrent list and regarded as a Fundamental Right and Directive Principles of State Policy.

Education is a significant step to achieving all other basic human rights. Education can help decrease poverty, reduce social inequalities, empower women and others marginalised, bring down discrimination and finally help individuals live life to their fullest potentials. It helps improve access to opportunities for a better life in terms of employment and business. It can also bring about peace and overall prosperity to a region. Therefore, education is one of the most important rights.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed by the Parliament in August 2009. When the Act came into force in 2010, India became one among 135 countries where education is a fundamental right of every child. Key features of RTE Act are enumerated below:

- The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) inserted Article 21A in the Indian Constitution which states:
 - "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State, may by law determine."
- As per this, the right to education was made a fundamental right and removed from the list of Directive Principles of State Policy.

- The RTE is the consequential legislation envisaged under the 86th Amendment.
- The article incorporates the word “free” in its title. What it means is that no child (other than those admitted by his/her parents in a school not supported by the government) is liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.
- This Act makes it obligatory on the part of the government to ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children falling in the age bracket six to fourteen years.
- Essentially, this Act ensures free elementary education to all children in the economically weaker sections of society.

However, to fill the existing gaps in term of coverage of schemes and fulfil the objective of Education for All, various initiatives have been taken by the Government. The New Education Policy introduced in 2020 aims for the Universalization of Education (nursery to secondary level) to 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in school education by 2030. The New Education Policy has revised academic format (5+3+3+4) i.e. Foundation stage, Primary school, Middle school, Secondary school, which previously was (10+2).

In addition to national level focus in five years plan and annual plan of the Ministry of Education, global community agreed on Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). The SDG-4 pertains to Quality Education and have targets and indicators to monitor the progress.

The article attempts to provide brief introduction about SDGs-4 and enumerate existing challenges and way forward in achieving SDGs-4 targets considering the national agenda and NEP 2020.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) -A Brief Profile

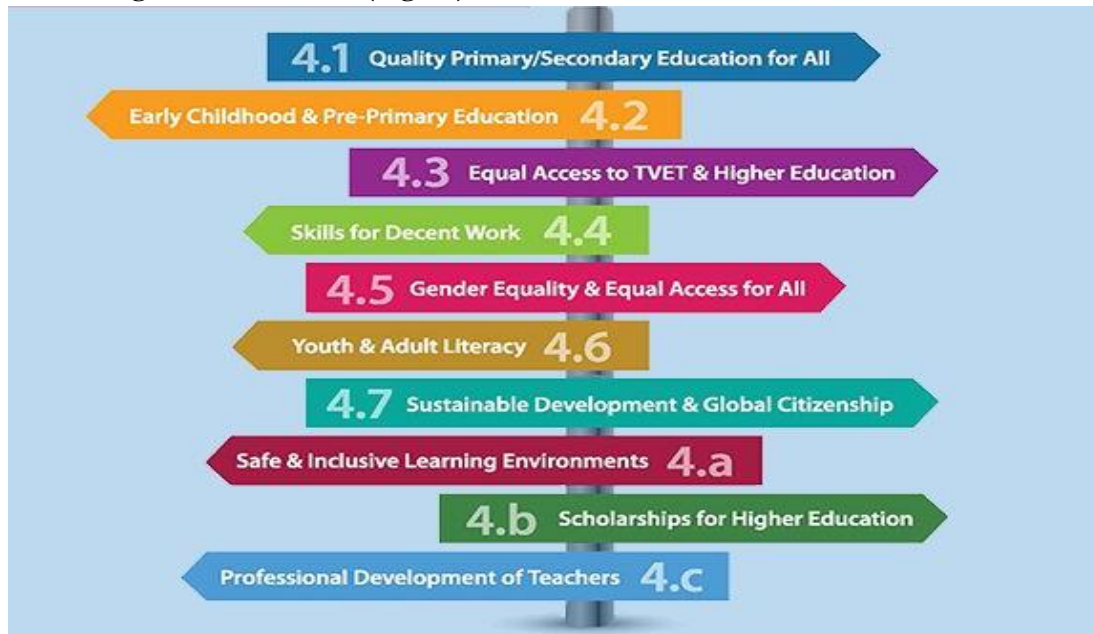
The United Nation Assembly adapted a new development agenda to take forward the unfinished goals of millennium development program in September 2015. The agenda is for sustainable development by 2030 that includes 17 globally endorsed SDGs and 169 targets. SDGs targets are given at Fig. 1.1 below.



SDG-4 - Quality Education:

Out of 17 goals of SDGs, 4th goal (SDG-4) pertains to Quality Education. The launch of SDG-4 for Education for All by 2030 represents an opportunity to make sure planning, development and monitoring of education system at National and Sub National Level.

SDG-4 targets are as follows (Fig 1.2):



Literature Review

Beena Pandey -August 2018 Achieving SDG 4 in India: Moving from Quantity to Quality Education for All-The article mentions the need for awareness of SDGs among communities and stakeholders.

Ellen Boeren¹ Published online: 15 March 2019 Understanding Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on “quality education” from micro, meso, and macro perspectives focuses on the need to employ high-quality teachers, educators, managers, and other staff, who receive scope for their own continuous professional development.

When we look at the financial aspects of SDG 4 implementation. It is estimated that financial need for the Country would be around 142 lakh crores. There financing gap is not seen in case of primary/secondary schooling due to their allocation under the Right to Education Act (RTE Act). However, financial requirement may be there to implement the strategies related to Early Childhood Development and tertiary and Higher Education. In addition, ensuring quality, technical, vocational, and inclusive education may require additional funding. However, considering the financial implication as above, there is a requirement to ensure that teachers, school management, and other stakeholders involved in the education sector in India are aware and well versed about SDG-4. The key constraints/challenges faced by the teachers in terms of awareness gap and strategy implementation is listed out to help the program manager, policymaker, and implementation agency to carry the SDG implementation effectively.

Challenges in Achieving SDG-4 targets during COVID-19 pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the health, economic condition, education and other important aspects of human lives. Lockdown and travel restrictions imposed by the Government has substantially impacted the delivery of education and implementation of national & international schemes/agendas. In some major cities with better internet and electricity connectivity, colleges were functioning online, however, education at pre-primary & primary level especially in rural areas were almost at halt.

Anganwadi centres were closed and Anganwadi workers were engaged in COVID-19 management along with ASHA workers. Students were not coming out of the homes due to high chances of coronavirus transmission. The financial condition of families during COVID-19 also lead to limited access to school and IT equipment. The provision of inclusive education has also been severely affected as the peer group support to especially abled students could not be extended.

To implement the agenda successfully it is pertinent to involve the stakeholders and build their capacities but during COVID-19 pandemic and even before, the involvement of teachers, AWWs, educational institutes, national & state government departments, NITI Aayog, international agencies were very limited and thus, trainings, capacity building, awareness generation and advocacy to achieve SDG targets could not be done properly.

It is also evident that the national policy /guidelines does not clearly indicates SDG-4 targets or have limited introduction to SDGs. The comprehensive note on SDGs along with IEC materials like banners, posters, flyers, hoardings etc may be provided to the schools/colleges so that people in-side and out-side the campus could be made aware about the international agenda for the year 2030.

Limited availability of infrastructure, skilled human resources, funds etc. are major constraints to implement strategies to achieve SDG-4. Thus, there is urgent need to have a well-defined strategies at all levels and way forward to achieve SDG-4 targets by educational institutions and government departments.

Suggestions/Way Forward for achieving SDG-4 targets:

1. Deployment and sustainability of Human Resources:

HR need assessment must be carried out by the educational institutions so that dedicated efforts for achieving the SDG-4 related targets could be made. Identified HR must be assigned with the task related to SDG-4 activities and accordingly their training and capacity building need must be fulfilled. As the national and/or international level policies like SDGs could not be implemented without cumulative contribution of each and every institute and staffs, it is pertinent that grassroot level action plan may be developed based on the availability of resources and target groups.

2. Capacity Building & Training:

Capacity Building and training of education professionals like teachers, school managers, anganwadi workers, state, district, block level education officers, staffs of implementation agencies & NGOs need to be conducted on various aspect of Sustainable Development Goals-4, its targets and implementation strategies.

3. Budget estimation and funding:

Educational institutes need to identify the key activities and budgetary estimates for the same so that SDGs related activities could be carried-out. Lack of budget planning at initial stages may hamper the plan implementation.

4. Recording and Reporting:

As the activities for achieving the SDG related targets involves so many sub-activities, involvement of infrastructure and HR and have financial implications, therefore, placing a well-defined reporting and recording process is essential to track the progress and refer existing gaps & findings for subsequent improvement in planning and implementation.

5. Availability of IT infrastructure and Use of Digital Platform:

There is a need to develop the IT infrastructure at National/ State/District/Block level, as well as, at schools/colleges. Support of National Informatic Centre (NIC), IT companies, educational institutions must be explored for establishing the modern digital classrooms and adopting the latest methods of teaching & learning.

Even though, digital platform are getting momentum over the past few years and the progress made so far in many areas like CO-WIN application, Arogya Setu, UDISE etc is much appreciated globally. However, there is a strong need to take the SDG-4 implementation on priority and track the progress made in the area using a dedicated facility based digital management information system. The existing dashboard being used by the Government compiles the state-wise information but until and unless each educational facilities, including government and private, get registered themselves via digital platform and start reporting the progress against SDG-4 targets and plans, the grassroot level achievement could not be

ensured. The digital platform will also provide access of institute-wise progress data to officials at National, State, District & Block level and thus, focused support may be provided.

6. Task force for SDGs at educational institutions:

A task force comprising of district/block administration, senior management, finance team, program managers, school administrators, teachers, local representative, community leaders, representatives from donor agencies and NGOs etc. may be formed. Each member of the Task Force may be involved in consultation and also assigned with dedicated responsibility w.r.t. SDG-4. Periodic meeting of the Task Force and evaluation of achievement could be done.

7. Involvement of Community Members, Youth Groups and Students:

Community members, youth groups like NCC & NYK and students, if engaged will be helpful in creating awareness generation & providing ground level support and, therefore, their involvement & engagement must be ensured. As above are related to the target population, they may better illustrate the problems faced and support needed. Increase in the demand of quality education is critical steps towards achievement of national and global targets. Areas with low literacy rate and limited resources must be targeted through consolidated efforts of private and public sector schools/colleges. Evidence based approach and Behavior Change Communication must be adopted to bring positive changes in the society.

8. Strengthening supply of Teachers & other educational staffs:

To meet the demand of teachers and education managers as per the requisite student:teacher ratio it is suggested that the capacity of teaching institution must be strengthened so that skilled HR could be generated and deployed for policy planning and implementation.

9. IEC and Advocacy:

Information Education and Communication strategies are the most important steps for creating awareness among various stakeholders & community. However, there are some essential points that must be considered while selecting the mode of IEC. Display of banners/hoardings/posters at prominent places; Creation of IEC in local language, Use of print media among literate population; Audio-Visual mode for conducting outreach in slums, rural and hard to reach areas having limited education coverage; Use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Whatsapp etc) among population having access to internet facilities etc. must be considered while planning for IEC activities.

Dedicated efforts must also be made to do advocacy with political & religious leaders, local influential person, donor groups, partner agencies so that the objective of education for all could be ensured and literacy rate among all gender, religion and groups could be improved.

10. Public Private Partnership:

In developing countries like India, SDG in education sector could not be achieved by public or private sector institutions in silos. To meet the demand and implement the policy effectively, the coordination and collaboration among private and public institutions is pre-requisite so that existing gaps could be filled in synchronization and everyone could access the quality education at affordable price. Scholarship opportunities for students through national & international donors/agencies may also be explored. There is a need to realize that all Sustainable Development Goals are interlinked and related to each other and thus, the overall objectives of the SDG-4 must be to provide quality education to all at all ages so that citizen could be engaged in employment opportunities and their standard of living, nutrition and health could be improved making them more empower to contribute socially and economically to the community, nation and global family.

Conclusion:

Teachers play a vital role in the implementation of education action programs in India. Therefore, it is pertinent that teachers should be aware of the policies programs strategies, and various goals at the National and international levels. To ensure this, there is a requirement to conduct a training need analysis and identify the gap in understanding and managerial capacities. In addition to teachers working in public & private organizations, the role played by other stakeholders like NGO local administration School management and most importantly field level workers like Anganwadi are vital for the better idea and implementation of SDG 4 strategies. In addition to

making the resources (HR, Infrastructure, Financial) available and building skills and capacities, use of digital platform, intersectoral collaborations, convergence with related schemes, synchronization with NEP 2020 recommendations and following facility-based approach (at school/college/university) in place of one-size-fits-all strategy would be needed.

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