

Third Anniversary of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020
July 29-20, 2023
Thematic Session10
Panel Discussion July 30, 2023
Understanding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

1. Introduction

Sound foundations in the early years have a lasting impact on children’s development and are critical for ensuring enrolment and retention of children in formal schooling. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) refers to basic skills in reading and arithmetic operations. It is the ability to read and understand a basic text write and perform simple mathematical operations. **The key components in Foundational Language and Literacy are Oral Language, Decoding, Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension and Writing.** As the UNICEF (2020) report Education for All point out, “on average 40 per cent of children across all OECD and EU countries do not have basic reading and mathematics skills by age 15” and this is a concern across the world.

Even though the number of school-going children has been increasing steadily year after year in India the learning of foundational skills is not showing the same trends. **The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) recognizes that the ability to read, write and perform basic operations with numbers is a necessary foundation and an indispensable prerequisite for all future schooling and lifelong learning.** Highlighting the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy the Policy reiterates that the rest of the policy will become irrelevant for students if the basic learning requirements (i.e., reading, writing and arithmetic) at the foundational level are not achieved. NEP has recommended that a National Mission on FLN should be set up by the Ministry of Education on priority.

The National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) named, **National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN)** Bharat Mission was launched by the Ministry of Education on 5th July 2021. NIPUN lays down priorities and actionable agenda for states and UTs to achieve the goal of proficiency in FLN for every child and covers 5 years of education continuum, which includes 3 years of preschool and grade 1 & 2. The mission aims to provide access and retention of children in the foundational years of schooling, teacher capacity building, development of high-quality and diversified student and teacher resources / learning materials, and tracking the progress of each child in achieving the learning outcomes.

As a follow up to the National Education Policy 2020 NEP, 2020, a 3-month School Preparatory Module, **Vidya Pravesh** has been developed by NCERT in consultation with various stake holders of school education at the state and national level. This is supportive materials for teachers and parents as also for the system to support parents, teaches as well as the children get ready for formal school learning.

National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) launched on 20th October 2022 contains guidelines for engaging Teaching-Learning Material (TLM) both for teachers and learners, teacher capacity building programme, assessment and pedagogical approaches to guide the nature of syllabus, textbooks and other resource materials for teaching and learning in the country for the most vital formative years of learning. *Jaadui Pitara* containing teaching-learning materials in thirteen Indian languages has also been launched on 20th February, 2023. This is an exemplar of content needed in any school for the Foundational Stage. It has toys, games, puzzles, puppets, posters, flashcards, story cards, playbooks for students, and handbooks for teachers.

With the above contexts and developments after the inception of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the third anniversary of the Policy was celebrated with an event of national conference and an exhibition on bringing in all stake holders of education from the states and union territories, and school systems, boards of school education and other departments to discuss the implementation of the Policy at different levels, and for reflection and further action. Thematic **Session 10** of the Conference held as a panel discussion on August 1, 2023 was on **Understanding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy**. The panelists consisted of educationists, policy planners and implementers, administrators, educational innovators and practicing teachers. The ideas, discussions, and the points for moving forward (way forward) are presented in the following sections.

2. Issues and Discussions

2.1. Understanding Foundational Literacy

There is a need to understand foundational literacy and numeracy as the formal schooling may not connect the life lived and the experiences outside the classroom and the school. This places the children from the periphery at a disadvantage. The illustration is that children who do not speak the mainstream languages and do not share the urban cultural contexts face severe disadvantages as their language and culture are unique and different from the mainstream. ‘How do FLN programmes address this issue?’ is a major concern. The linguistic and cultural differences of the (teaching-learning) materials make learning very challenging for them and finally it results in loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, and loss of curiosity. This calls for the need to respect and take into serious consideration the learner’s context and culture and above all their language and build upon them to slowly bring them towards mainstream languages and learning.

Literacy is not education. Education is connecting with environment where cognitive as well as affective aspects develop. Therefore, the three Hs – Head, Hand and Heart should replace the three Rs – Reading, Writing and Retention in order to move to holistic education. This has been done in Ladakh under Operation New Hope (with government) in which Village Education Committees take charge of schools and introducing literacy in a logical way by drawing from nature in order to build related experience and knowledge. *Curiosity* software of childhood comes preloaded in the hard drives i.e. brain by nature-linguistic abilities and the inquisitive brain. Learning and education is about stimulus and

constructed environment. Effective FLN should be moving from known to unknown, building an association between them, two unknowns at the same time, progression from familiar to unfamiliar and one unknown at a time. System of FLN should be about local language learning and writing and introducing English as a second language and this leads to a ‘**Child-Driven system**’.

2.2. Implementation of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Achievement of the goals of FLN depends on recognising the child as the centre of learning and the school system. It is essential that we engage with students in a manner that captivates their attention, makes them learn and contributes to their holistic development. National Education Policy 2020 in its futuristic vision underscores some of the most essential aspects of our education system. **The Policy recognizes that the ability to read, write and perform basic operations with numbers is a necessary foundation and an indispensable prerequisite for all future schooling and lifelong learning.** The Policy believes that the rest of the policy will become irrelevant for students if the basic learning requirements i.e., reading, writing and arithmetic at the foundational level are not achieved by the students. To achieve this with young learners (below 8 years of age), learning needs to be imparted in a joyful manner. In this regard, NEP 2020 introduces various changes in curriculum and pedagogy in schools, thereby making learning *Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging*. with the help of *toy-based pedagogy, sports-based pedagogy and art-based pedagogy*.

NCF for Foundational Stage (NCF_FS) for children between ages 3-8 launched on 20th October 2022 addresses all domains of development-physical, socio- emotional-ethical, cognitive and language as well as literacy, aesthetic and cultural aspects. NCF-FS recommends **play-based pedagogical approach**. NCF-FS emphasizes the importance of ‘play’ at the core of the curriculum organization, pedagogy, time and content organization, and the overall experience of the child. 1. *Play can be free, guided, or structured.* 2. *Conversations, stories, music, movement, arts, craft, toys and games are various methods to engage children in play - other methods could be innovated.* 3. *Outdoor play is actively encouraged.*

2.3. Multilingualism at the Foundational Stage

Learning outcomes cannot be improved without a transformative change in systems and practices like teaching and learning, rote learning to active learning for **FLN skills are gateway skills to all future learning**; they need to be developed early and well for later success in school. These skills need to be developed at a high level of proficiency (mastered). NCF-FS lays down some important pedagogical principles for the foundational stage. These need to be incorporated in classroom teaching and learning. The three major aspects of effective teaching-learning include: *Play-based learning; nurturing positive relationships in the classroom and using a familiar language for teaching and learning*. Multilingualism-making use of the languages of children will be the strategy for inclusion during the Foundational Stage.

There is need to bring about transformative change for FLN at scale and it has several challenges. However, the following major aspects will help support improved FLN learning at scale. FLN solutions should be comprehensive including children's learning materials, teacher handbooks, assessment practices, strong Continuous Professional Development programme for teachers, effective mentoring support to teachers to improve classroom practices. The FLN program must address certain practical problems that teachers face e.g. multilingual, multi-grade and multilevel teaching and learning situations. Also, the loss in training quality on large scale (annual) in face-to-face teacher training programmes should also be addressed. All FLN solutions should be designed for implementation at scale: Not to be burdensome for teachers or the system .

Literacy includes thinking and reasoning, along with the basic skills. Mastery of these skills is necessary for attaining proficiency. Skills need to be developed in age-stage appropriate manner. Students learn best in interactive mode with positive environment and warmth, play-based learning, environment of relationship and creates high self-confidence. It also helps children to feel positive about coming to school. Relationship growth and connection of neurons are better in students who are in positive relationship of school and home. **Play is central to learning** (physical, co-operational, socio-emotional). Play in FLN means:

1. Curiosity, wonder and discovery should be the grounding of any play-based learning.
2. Sense of choice of agency should be with the child where child's role is free and teachers' role is guided and structured
3. Getting joy and fun in activity.

2.4. How can schools realise the vision of FLN?

Schools are the real agencies which implement any educational programme and the success of programmes and policies rests with the schools and the teachers. Schools like Satya Bharti Schools of Bharti Foundation for the underprivileged children provide quality education to nearly 40,000 students of which 50% are girls. With reduced exposure to education, socialization which schools bring in and many more aspects, their attendance, attention, discipline at school, apart from learning loss was manifesting in classrooms. There is a need for supportive eco-system; empowering teachers, role of academic staff and admin function, role of parent, community and leveraging technology. Loss of learning, lack of steady routine, children with low energy and focus and ways to deal with these problems such as improving well-being, building teacher capacity, vibrant classroom, strength parent connect and ensuring child safety are major concern of implementation at the school level. Further, teacher's autonomy and freedom are critical for achieving FLN. Teacher creativity is essential in all cases and also for leveraging technology. Satya Bharti School's programme of students as volunteers of adult education-supporting the adults in their learning- do wonders for students as teachers (of their parent at home) are very good learners. Their effort to teach the adults reinforces their learning.

3. Way forward and Conclusion

The above deliberations take us to reflect and plan for the future on how to go about to in furthering the implementation the FLN effectively and making it work in its true spirits. As the title of the session suggests ‘understanding’ of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, understanding ‘what is literacy?’ and ‘what is not literacy?’ ‘Why mere literacy is not education?’ and ‘how the school systems, teachers, parents and of course the learners (very young learners here) at various levels -state, national, school and classroom become part of the implementation of FLN to realise vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020’ is the most pertinent aspect of implementation of the FLN. Following are the major takeaways from this session.

3.1. For Government- Central and State Government ministries and Institutions

Effective implementation strategies need to be chalked out **at scale**. This makes the FLN as nationwide and statewide programme and as a mission mode programme wherein the Central Government-Ministry of Education, GOI and institutions like NCERT work with the state government education ministries and institutions like SCERT in the planning and implementation of FLN. Each component of FLM needs to be implemented and carried out in a mission mode.

- i.** Brain storming and orientation of the implementation agencies and personnel who / which include SCETs, administrators, CEO, DEOs, Block level educational officers and also the resource persons.
- ii.** Development of the materials-both advocacy materials and TLMs brining in the local elements, cultures, folk tales, indigenous knowledge, languages and so on.
- iii.** Training of teachers using blended approaches-on line and face-to-face mode.
- iv.** Advocacy with parents and community as a whole and strengthening the Village Education Committees (VEC) to own the FLN initiatives and the school (like the Ladakh experiment named as Operation New Hope. This was initiated by Mr. Sonam Wangchuk, Innovator and Educator with the support of the Government in Ladakh.)
- v.** Ministry of Education, Government of India’s initiative viz. NIPUN, NCF-FS, Balvatika, Jadui Pitara and NISTHA (professional development programme of FLN) are being implemented in all the states. These needs to be advocated and reinforced at all levels and the cooperation and collaboration with state and non-state agencies need to strengthened in order to achieve the goals of NEP on FLN.

3.2. Academic interventions -

New Pedagogies: NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage advocate new pedagogies with the focus of the learner as the center of learning and play as processes of FLN so as to make learning joyful and interesting. Play as pedagogy, toy-based pedagogy, experiential learning and peer learning, recognizing the local knowledge and inclusion are the crux of the pedagogical understanding and realision of FLN. Teachers, teacher educators and also the policy and programme implementation personnel at the state and system levels needs to be familiarized and equipped with the new

pedagogies as conceived and advocated by NEP and NCF-FS. Advocacy and orientation programs are an essential requirement with usable materials on these pedagogies. NCERT with the collaboration of SCERTs need to develop tailor made programmes on these pedagogies and materials of different forms-print, video, digital and interactive. This supports the speedy and effective implementation of the FLN.

Teacher Professional Development: Teacher is central to the school system. Teacher pedagogical knowledge, attitudes and beliefs are essential for a successful FLN. Teacher preparation and development need to be addressed with a sound understanding which recognizes teacher as a professional. The ingredients of the professional development programmes should include pedagogical aspects which the NEP 2020 advocates viz. play as central to learning and play as processes of learning, toy-based pedagogy, children as the center of learning, peer learning and experiential learning.

Multilingual education: NEP stresses the need to bring in / include the languages of children in order ensure access to schooling and retention of children from all strata of society. There is need to understand what multilingualism and multilingual education is and ways and means of realizing multilingual education in multigrade teaching situations as also in different contexts. This is both academic and logistical aspect.

3.4. Private Educational Institutions

Institutions and school run by private agencies need to be partnered in the national mission of achieving the goals of FLN. As the deliberations of the conference hinted private agencies can play a role by sharing the infrastructure, expertise in the development of materials, professional development of teachers. The initiative of bringing in the students of higher classes to support the adult education programme by the Bharati Foundation School is an illustration on how schools (not only private schools) and students can support the government's initiative of educating all in the country to realise the vision of the NEP 2020.

The thematic session 10 'Understanding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy' was aimed at creating a discourse on developing an understanding 'what literacy and numeracy are' in the current contexts and practices being carried out as part of the implementation of NEP 2020 and NCF-FS. The issues flagged in the discourse inform the need for rigorous and immediate action at all levels and at a large scale to achieve the goals of FLN by 2030 as set by the National Education Policy 2020. Collaborating with various stake holders and understanding the goals and implementing working and workable pedagogies to equip the teachers and the systems as a whole would lead us on the path to achieve the goal.

The panel was **chaired** by **Prof. Dinesh Prasad Saklani**, Director, NCERT and other panellists were:

- i. Mr. Sonam Wangchuk, Engineer, innovator and education reformist

- ii. Ms. Archana Sharma Awasthi, Joint Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education
- iii. Dr. Dhir Jhingran, Founder, Language & Learning Foundation
- iv. Ms. Mamta Saikiya, CEO, Bharti Foundation

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