Contemporary Changes in Primary School Curriculum: EnsuringInclusive and Equitable Quality Education

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Abstract

Primary education and curriculum are of utmost importance because throughout this time, which begins at roughly age 5 and lasts until 10 or 11 years old, the child learns and develops values, habits, the ability to differentiate, and attitudes that will benefit them throughout their life. This first level is crucial for those as well who, for whatever reason, are unable to pursue further education. The curriculum usually needs to be adapted to reflect the requirements, demands, and values of society. Implementing curriculum in accordance with societal needs will enrich education, whilst failing to do so could have catastrophic effects on education with regards to economic development. The term "curriculum" refers to a student's overall planned experience inside a formal educational context. Goals and objectives, the curriculum's outline, the material that must be taught and learned, teaching and pedagogical strategies, assessment, materials for teacher learning, school procedures (including classroom procedures), the learning environment and culture, among other things, are some of the factors that make up the curriculum. In intention of this article is to study the primary education in India during different eras vis a vis: Vedic period, ancient India, during British rule, post-independence, the new education policy 2020 and the changes that took place in the curriculum setting during these periods.

Keywords: Primary Education, Contemporary changes, Curriculum, New Education Policy 2020, National Curriculum Framework.

I. <u>Introduction:</u>

When importance of quality education is talked about, it is seen that it is prioritised in the UN Sustainable Development Goals by noting that only the fight against poverty, hunger, and health difficulties comes before it.

The UN and its member states seek to achieve below goals by 2030:

Free primary and secondary education
Equal access for affordable technical, higher education and vocational.
discrimination elimination in education
Sustainable development of global citizenship
Expand higher education scholarships
Quality pre-primary education- equal access
Increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success
Universalnumeracy and literacy

Build and upgrade safe and inclusive schools.

Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries

Table 1: Targets of the UN Sustainable Development Education Goals

(Source: Sustainable Development Goals Goal 4: Quality education - The Global Goals)

II. Objectives:

IIa. To study the attention given to primary education in India over the ages, from the Vedic era to the present.

IIb. To evaluate how changes (past and present) have helped or will help the country accomplish the UN Goals.

IIc. To study the key challenges and factors that can influence the actual desired outcomes.

III. <u>Methodology:</u>

Analysing the literature data made available through various research articles was done for the current investigation. Relevant research papers were searched using combinations of the terms/single terms pedagogy, Primary schools education, academic attributes, Teachers, factors influencing primary education, stakeholders of primary school education, curriculum, contemporary changes in curriculum, NEP 2020 etc.

IV. History of Primary Education and curriculum changes in India

a. Vedic Era

When it comes to education, India's history is incredibly vibrant and inspiring. Sages and scholars imparted instruction verbally (referred to as shruti) during the Vedic era, passing on knowledge from one generation to the next (Singh and Nath, 2015). The system was founded on the Gurukul, and the student (sisya) would reside at the Gurukula under the guardianship of the Guru as his family. The Guru's job was to evaluate the student's qualities, interests, and psychological characteristics and then teach information in accordance with those findings.

The goal of education was to cultivate the pupils' noble ideas, as well as their culture, character, and individuality. The curriculum would include the Vedas along with upvedas and Rahasyas.Six vedangas (Veda + Angas) would help academics comprehend the six Vedas and the four Vedas. Among the vendangas that would fall under this category are Siksha (phonetics), Chandas (metrics), Kalpa (ritual), Nirukta (etymology), Jyotisha (astrology), and Vyakarana (grammar).Other subject including sciences like Dharmashastra (LAWS), Artha-sastra (Economics), Sastra-vidya (Warfare), Kala (Fine Arts) would also be taught. This ancient system provided a 360-degreedevelopment to the student (Selvamani,2019).Children Would start their education in Gurukula at the age of 5 with a formal "upanayana" (sacred thread ceremony).

The key features for the primary education during Vedic era would include high status for Guru, Gurukula, no regulation of state on education plus free education, individual and more connected

teaching process, and forests (natural ambience) as key components of education. Education was imparted in Sanskrit language (Sharma and Sharma, 2004).

Further, the curriculum of the Buddhist system consisting of pitakas, abhidharma, and sutras was also prevalent.

b. Medieval Era

The most important function at the time was to give education. The emphasis of the curriculum was on knowledge expansion and the dissemination of Islamic morals, rules, and customs. The fundamental goal of education, which was founded on religion, was to instill a religious mindset in students. Certain passages from the Koran have to be memorised by the Muslim students. During this time, Akbar took various measures to make it more organised. He suggested that letter knowledge, word knowledge, and sentence knowledge all be taught to the pupil in that order. (Sharma and Sharma, 2004).

Since there were still no books, pupils used to write on taktis. The primary languages of communication were Arabic and Persian, and proficiency in both languages was required for pupils to be promoted. It was deemed mandatory to recite the Quran, and this was a significant component of their education. In the Middle Ages, there were two types of education: secular (which included Arabic literature, grammar, history, philosophy, mathematics, geography, politics, economics, and the Greek language) and religious (which included the study of the Quran, Mohammad and his conquests, Islamic law, and Islamic history). Maktabs were the organisations in charge of providing basic education, and madrasas were the organisations in charge of providing higher education.

c. British rule era:

From start of 1858 the British Crown took control of educationpolicy and kept it under its belt until 1919. After 1919, the province-level Indian ministers took over as the in charge(Chaudhary, 2009).

The East India Company's involvement in providing education in British India was described in Wood's Education Despatch, published in 1854. By this time the primary education was in a terrible state because company's focus was on university education only. Thus, primary education remained neglected. Wood's Despatch "suggested some reforms and made the Company responsible for Primary education". This as well did not improve the state of primary education as the rules for grants/aids were impractical (Sharma and Sharma, 2004).

The Indian Education Commission (1882), headed by Lord Ripon, was established on February 3rd. William Hunter served as the commission's chairman, and its official name is the Hunter Commission. The following suggestions were made by the commission: The primary school medium should be in the student's mother tongue, and the curriculum should promote student independence. Additionally, district, municipal and town regions boards oversaw primary schools(Jayapalan, 2013).

For a study of education in India, the Hartog Committee on Education was established in 1929. The Committee concluded that a significant amount of waste and stagnation rendered basic education inefficient. As a result, the committee suggested that the institutional framework be strengthened. Following that, the Zakir Hussain Committee (1937) and the Central Advisory Board of Education (1938) placed emphasis on the elementary school's medium of teaching. Vernacular or Indian languages were suggested as the educational medium by both panels. The junior and senior basic levels of elementary education should last eight years (from the ages of 6 to 14), according to the Sargeant Commission (1944) and the Second Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education (1939).

d. Post Independence era:

Post Independence education became the States' responsibility. Indian Constitution recognized the importance of "free and compulsory education for all children until the age of fourteen years, in Article 45 of the Directive Principle of State Policy".

Although before to 1976, education was solely the province of the states, with the passage of the 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976, education was added to the list of concurrent subjects. The National Pattern of Education (NPE) and general education policy for all levels were recommendations made to the government by the Education Commission from 1966 to 1966.

Education was described by NPE as a special investment in the now and the future. There has been a significant growth in educational institutions across the nation since the Policy on Education was adopted in 1968. The 1968 Policy's prescriptions, meanwhile, were not exactly put into practise. Numerous issues (access, quality, quantity, unity, and financial expenditure) persisted and grew throughout time, leading to the creation of a new education policy.

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) during 1992-92 following a review of the NPE 1986 recommended for the following modifications: a) To universalize the Elementary Education, b) educational opportunities for all, c) development for girl's education, d) implementing vocational education, e) higher educationequalization, f) technical educationmodernization, g) improving content quality, h) maintain the nation's efforts focused on the process of education at all levels...

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act of 2002 inserted Article 21-A to the Indian Constitution, establishing access to a basic education as a fundamental right. This means that all children (between the ages of 6 and 14) would get free and required education from the State. Further, a new fundamental duty was added under Article51-A, that mentions that "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India who is the parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward between the age of six and fourteen years". SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (started in 2001) became a Government's initiative for "the achievement of Universalization of ElementaryEducation (UEE) in a time-bound manner, as had been mandated by 86th Amendment. This programme focuses on opening new schools where there are no such facilities exist and strengthen existing facilities (additional classrooms, toilets,drinking water, maintenance grants, and school improvement grants." (http://ssa.nic.in/).

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act of 2012, which is the follow-up legislation anticipated under Article 21-A, states that every child has a right to a full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school that complies with specific fundamental norms and standards. On April 1, 2010, both the RTE Act and Article 21-A came into effect (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India). website: http://mhrd.gov.in/rte).

The NPE 2016 supported changes to the No-Detention Policy, the promotion of Sanskrit, the instillation of values via education, regular attendance and punctuality in school, cleanliness, self-control, industriousness, and an entrepreneurial spirit. The willingness to act responsibly in service, innovation, and sensitiveness for equality, women respect, and consideration for senior citizens should also be emphasised (NEP 2016 report).

To sum up, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Scheme, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012, and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme are the only regulations controlling primary school education in India. SSA in itself covers allminor programs or projects or Schemes of Centre and State governments (e.g. operation blackboard, district primary education plan (DPEP), education guarantee scheme (EGS) and alternative and innovative (AIE) education, Kasturba Gandhi Bal Vikas (KGBV), Mahila-Samakhya, Janshala, and others.

e. <u>Contemporary Changes in Primary School curriculum and National Education</u> Policy (NEP 2020)

In 1968, Indira Gandhi, who was the prime minister at the time, unveiled the first education strategy. The second education strategy was created in 1986 by Rajiv Gandhi, who was the prime minister at the time, and underwent significant revisions in 1992. The NEP 2020 is the third such policy India post-independence (seeing that the 34 years old policy is now becoming in-effective and needs massive changes) as per current global challenges i.e. enhance quality of education, global access to Indian education system, deal with the needs of knowledge based economy.

As per the NEP 2020, the curriculum will be divided basis the 5+3+3+4 system rather than the previously existing 10+2 system. The NEP 2020 will divide the curriculum in the below mentioned 4 different stages:

- Foundation Stage- foundation age is for 5 years including 3 for pre-school education (in pre-schools or anganwadis) and class 1 and 2. This stage is primarily focussed on language skill and their developments.
- Preparatory Stage- This stage is kept for 3 years upto class 5 (from 8 to 11 years). The development of numerical abilities will receive significant emphasis at this time. The local language will also be taught to all youngsters at the same time. The youngster will also be taught science, art, maths, and other subjects through examples and experiments.
- Middle Stage- This stage is again for 3 years from class 6th grade to 8th grade. Subject-based curriculum would be taught, further, coding education would also be started. Along with this, opportunities for vocational testing and vocational internship will be provided. The aim for this stage is to make the children competent for employment only during the school going days.
- Secondary Stage- This stage is for 4 years (9th grade to 12th grade). During this stage, there will be intensive study of the subjects. The students will be allowed to choose the subjects of their likings. Students have the ability to select whatever topics they want (subject choice). They can choose science courses in addition to courses in the arts and commerce.

Board exams for 10th and 12th grade students will be altered in structure to lessen the workload while keeping in mind the students' overall growth. Multiple choice questions and a semester are two examples of improvements that have been or will be made. The examination are planned to be conducted twice in a year. The objective of education will be to test the student's knowledge and to reduce or eliminate tendency of rote learning. Accordingly, a new national assessment centre will be created, and "Artificial intelligence" (AI)-based software will be used to analyse student development and provide them the ability to make decisions about their future.

In recent times, the focus has shifted; earlier it was just acquisition of knowledge but now is more child-centric and the emphasis is on developing skills. The primary school curriculum falls under the initial two stages i.e. foundation and preparatory stages. Let us discuss these two stages in detail.

Foundation Stage

Children between the ages of 3 and 8 are eligible for this stage. During this fundamental Stage, children begin their formal education. The foundation of this stage is Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

ECCE emphasises "flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning" and covers alphabets, numbers, languages, colours, counting and shapes in addition to puzzles and activities that promote logical reasoning, solving problems, painting, drawing and other types of puppetry, drama, craft, and visual art. The development of social skills, sensitivity, acceptable behaviour, courtesies, ethics, personal and public cleanliness, teamwork, and cooperation are all stressed. To obtain the best results in the areas of cognitive development, cultural/artistic development, socio-emotional-ethical developmentand physical and motor growth is the overriding purpose of ECCE.

Curricular Structure: Physical development, cognitive development, social-emotional development, and language development are the domains that the NCF's Foundation Stage curriculum is broken down into cognitive development, language and literacy development, socio-emotional-ethical development, and aesthetic and cultural development. The Panchakosha imagination also influences these developmental domains.

Content:Only in Grade 1 are textbooks utilised, and the majority of the curriculum is presented through toys, puzzles, and manipulatives. The best content is created in conjunction with these materials and is learned through actual physical exploration of the classroom and outdoor area. Worksheets may start to take on a greater significance in the later years of this era. The development of language and literacy depends on content from children's books.

Pedagogy: The educational strategy recommended is play-based and emphasises the development of warm, enduring bonds between the teacher and the students. The pedagogical design should strike a mix between more social group-based education and independent, self-paced study. It would take enough time for the youngster to practise and repeat on their own for the foundation skills in literacy and maths to develop. Children should have independent work time where they can work with materials or worksheets to balance the whole class instruction.

Assessments: The majority of assessments are teacher-made observations rather than direct tests of pupils' aptitude. Children's worksheets can educate teachers about their students' learning progress.

Classroom Arrangement:At the age the children need to be able to wander around freely and have enough opportunities to satisfy their innate curiosity. The design of the classroom should accommodate the children's needs while allowing them to move around freely.

Teachers:Since the student-teacher interaction is so important at this stage, all of the domains would be taught by the same instructor; there would be no subject- or domain-specific teachers. Since each student needs to receive personalised instruction and undergo observational evaluation, a reduced teacher-to-student ratio is also anticipated.

The Foundation Stage serves as a link between the child's home environment and the official school setting. It helps students build the foundation literacy and numeracy skills necessary for learning all other subject areas. Along with these abilities, it fosters advantageous dispositions for active learning, which will help the kids become engaged learners in formal educational settings. Children learn naturally via play and discovery, and the Foundation Stage

Preparatory Stage

Grades 3, 4, and 5 are included in the Preparatory Stage, which lasts 3 years.

The Foundation Stage's play-, discovery-, and activity-based pedagogy and curriculum will be expanded upon in the Preparatory Stage, a three-year educational period that also gradually introduces textbooks and other aspects of more traditional classroom instruction. With the probable exception of a few specialised language and art teachers (who would be shared around the school or school complex), the most of the instructors during this period would be generalists. This stage will lay the broad basis for all topics, including reading, writing, speaking, physical education, art, languages, science, and mathematics, in order to equip kids to dive further into subject matter through specialised subjects and subject instructors.

Curricular Structure:Languages, mathematics, the arts, physical education, and the globe are the curricular areas that make up the NCF's Preparatory Stage curriculum. The environment that the students live in is an interdisciplinary field that promotes inquiry into and comprehension of both the social and natural worlds. This curriculum area also incorporates elements of vocational education work. At this point, the preparation mostly focuses on aptitudes and tendencies.

Content: The use of textbooks increases in the fields of language and mathematics. The language textbook should be supplemented with a variety of children's books to strengthen pupils' reading skills. Although materials and tools still play a part in mathematics, the emphasis is now on symbolic representation in order to connect with concrete materials. Less emphasis should be placed on textbooks and more on hands-on learning with physical exploration serving as the primary content source. The subject matter must be presented in the student's comfortable environments.

Pedagogy:At this point, the approach is still activity- and discovery-based, gradually encouraging students to participate in class activities. It is important to promote students' capacity for sustained attention and concentration during class lectures and debates. While some homework can be included in class activities, a certain amount of the home work should be there.

Assessments:In this stage, assessments consist of a combination of short formal written evaluations and observations of students' activities and worksheet corrections. The more formative assessments should be supplemented with periodic summative evaluations.

Classroom Arrangement: The environment in a classroom should strike a balance vis a vis a formal setting and a setup that promotes movement and discovery. It should be encouraged for students to work in groups while seated.

Teachers:Teachers still teach a variety of subjects and remain generalists. Specialists from the school complexes may be invited to teach art and physical education in order to develop particular skills, but the class teachersought to be available and should be regulating these interactions with the pupils.

The talents and dispositions that start to emerge in the Foundation Stage are combined in the Preparatory Stage. Students are required to become proficient in literacy, and mathematics as well as to acquire additional skills that will aid them in a methodical examination of the social and ecological environments in which they live.

V. <u>Discussion:</u>

The addition of activity-based learning is one of the important adjustments to the elementary school curriculum. In order to build practical skills, the curriculum now emphasises practical experiences, group projects, and real-world problem-solving activities. To give kids employable skills, vocational education has been introduced at the primary level, which is another big development.

With a focus on meeting the varied learning needs of children, the curriculum has also grown more inclusive. The development of remedial instruction and support mechanisms for children who need extra help has contributed to closing the achievement gap. The way assessments are done has also significantly changed. Instead of summative evaluation, formative assessment is now prioritised. Instead of depending just on written tests to assess student learning, teachers are urged to employ a variety of evaluation instruments.

The modern revisions to the elementary school curriculum have enhanced pupil learning. The learning experience is now more engaging for students, and their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities have significantly improved. Students have benefited from the addition of vocational education in developing practical skills that they can utilise in their future employment.

Modern updates to the primary school curriculum in India have been a positive development. Learning for students has benefited from the emphasis on obtaining skills rather than just knowledge. To guarantee that the curriculum remains relevant and efficient in fulfilling the shifting demands of students, there is still opportunity for improvement and it is crucial to keep analysing and upgrading it.

The primary school curriculum in India has undergone several changes over the years to adapt to the evolving needs of students and the demands of the modern world. While it is challenging to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of these changes on skill levels, there are some general observations and potential effects.

- Holistic Development: The contemporary changes in the primary school curriculum have emphasized holistic development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical aspects. This broader approach aims to equip students with a well-rounded set of skills beyond academic knowledge.
- Focus on Practical Skills: There has been a shift towards incorporating practical skills and experiential learning into the curriculum. This change intends to enhance problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration among students.
- Integration of Technology: The increasing integration of technology in the curriculum has the potential to enhance digital literacy, computer skills, and information processing abilities among students. This is particularly important in today's digital age.
- Vocational Education: The curriculum changes have also emphasized vocational education at
 the primary level, aiming to introduce students to various career options and develop specific
 skills that can be applied in real-world scenarios. This approach intends to make education
 more relevant to the needs of the job market.
- Language Skills: The importance of language skills has been emphasized, with a focus on improving reading, writing, and communication abilities. This includes the promotion of multilingualism and the inclusion of regional languages in the curriculum.

While these changes have the potential to positively impact skill levels, several factors can influence the actual outcomes. Some considerations include:

- Implementation Challenges: The effective implementation of curriculum changes can be challenging, requiring appropriate teacher training, infrastructure, and resources. Inadequate implementation can limit the impact on skill development.
- Evaluation and Assessment Methods: The evaluation and assessment methods used to measure student performance should align with the desired skill outcomes. Traditional examination-based assessments may not effectively capture the development of skills like critical thinking and creativity.
- Disparities in Access: Socioeconomic disparities and variations in the quality of education across different regions can affect the extent to which students benefit from curriculum changes. Equal access to resources and opportunities is crucial to ensure skill development for all.
- Time Required: Skill development takes time and continuous reinforcement. It is essential to provide students with a supportive learning environment that allows for consistent practice and application of skills.

In conclusion, contemporary changes in the primary school curriculum in India have aimed to promote holistic development, practical skills, and the integration of technology. While these changes hold the potential to enhance skill levels, their impact can be influenced by various factors such as implementation challenges, assessment methods, disparities in access, and the time required for skill development. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum's effectiveness are necessary to make further improvements and ensure positive outcomes.

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