



NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND SUSTAINABILITY IN SCHOOL EDUCATION : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Article History: Received: 01.03.2023 Revised: 07.04.2023 Accepted: 22.04.2023

Abstract

Education is one of the most important factors that determine the future of a nation. People and governments have understood the importance of an educated population today. Economic and social development can happen only when the population is educated. Contrary to this if the population is illiterate, progress would be very difficult. Illiteracy contributes to incompetency, incapability, making them superstitions and bound by false beliefs. Thus making them change would be a difficult task. Globally there is a realization that education can only help to bridge the disparities to a certain extent. This has prompted the United Nations (UN) to come up with the list of sustainable development goals (SDG) for transformation of nations by the year 2030. One among the seventeen sustainable goals listed by the UN is the SDG4 that deals with education. The focus of SGD 4 is to ensure universal, equitable and all inclusive education for all by the year 2030. As far as India is concerned, there is a serious take on the SDG4. A lot of efforts have been put from the Government side to achieve sustainability in education by 2030. A conscious effort to this was the drafting of the National Education Policy 2020. Through this article, an attempt is made to understand the various provisions under SDG4 and that of NEP 2020. It also tries to analyze and understand the various schemes and initiatives of the government that would enable it to achieve sustainability in education by 2030. The authors have used secondary data for the preparation of this article. The analysis and discussions herein are strictly based on the opinions of authors and their long experience in the educational field.

Keywords – NEP 2020, SDG 4, Education, sustainability, government schemes and scholarships

Introduction

Education is one of the most important contributors to the social and economic development of a nation. Education sector around the world is undergoing a transformational change today, with the contribution of the VUCA environment. Foreseeing changes and anticipating the importance of the same, the education system must be able to align itself with the ever changing global ecosystem. The changing demands of the industry have to be met through conscious effort in planning the education requirements. Universal access to quality education has become the need of the hour. Governments have realized the importance of an educated

population. As such, greater focus needs to be provided in terms of universal access to quality education. With the Agenda 2030 by the United Nations for transforming the world, achieving sustainability and inclusion has become the watchword for every nation. Each of them have designed their own ways and mechanisms to achieve them. India had understood the same years back and had floated a lot of schemes to improve the educational landscape of India. It has even introduced many new schemes and strengthened the old schemes for the same. The introduction of the National Educational Policy was a curated step towards the achievement of SDG4. NEP

2020 has principles and clauses aligned to achieve sustainable and inclusive education.

Educational landscape of school education in India

National university of educational planning and administration report (2022) states, that India has about 26.5 crore students that come from diverse cultural, regional and socio economic backgrounds. There are about 15 lakh schools in India catering to the requirements for school education. Such schools are broadly divided into two -Public schools -that have a government stake and are managed by government and private schools -that are managed by private individuals or groups and government do not have a stake in the same. Among these 15 lakh schools, 29% come under the category of private schools with an ensured representation of 11,45,35,717 students. Among the 29% private schools, 6% are Aided schools with a representation of 2,64,46,332 students . The remaining 23% come under the unaided private schools category with a representation of 8,80,89,385 students. Among these 15 lakh schools 68% constitute government schools and they represent a student enrolment of 13,24,25,644 and 3 % are constituted by others with a representation of 6,8,43,100 students. This article tries to study the NEP 2020 principles. It also tries to understand important provisions of sustainable development goals 4(SDG4). Further to this it also helps in bringing out and analyzing the various initiatives of the Indian Government that would lead to achievement of sustainability and inclusion in education. India had its first national Policy on Education inaugurated in 1968 as per the

recommendation of the Kothari Commission. Some of the focus areas were- free and compulsory education, honor and respect for teachers, introduction of three language structures in schools, education and research was also given priority. This brought in a radical change in the education system. The next educational policy was launched in 1986 by the then Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. The focus of this policy was to improve education, expansion of scholarship, adult education, incentive schemes, open university system and others. These education policies has some drawbacks -like fragmentation of education, importance to science and mathematics, lesser focus on research, rigid separation of streams and many more. In order to overcome the gaps, The new educational policy NEP 2020 was introduced. This was based on the report submitted by Dr. Kasthurirangan. The new policy removes the barriers of the old educational policies. This tries to revamp the existing educational structure for better consolidation and reach. The core focus here is on providing free, equitable, quality education with focus on affordability and ease of access.

Wikipedia defines sustainable goals as a set of interconnected objectives aimed at promoting sustainable development across economic, social and environment dimensions. These goals were decided by the United Nations member states in 2015 to bridge the global gaps in various areas to bring about a comprehensive development of all countries. The various sustainable goals are listed below :

Fig. 1- Sustainable Goals



Source - Adapted from Wikimedia Commons

This article is an effort to understand how India is trying to achieve the goals laid out by NEP 2020 and SDG4.

Literature Review

Educated population is the backbone of a well-developed and strong nation. Of late nations have started realizing the importance of an educated population. Earlier educational policies in India could not bring in a greater change as far as the educational scenario is concerned. It had many drawbacks and the progress was very slow. The new policy is aimed at providing universal quality education for all. It aims to bridge the gap between the socially and economically advantaged and disadvantaged groups. It also tries to reduce gender disparities and also focuses on lifelong learning. India aims to achieve global leadership in economic, social and scientific development through sustainable initiatives in all areas of education. On united nations agenda 2030 for sustainable development goals, India seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote

lifelong learning opportunities for all”. To achieve this goal, an overhaul of the existing education system is required. To cater to this requirement, the NEP 2020 was cautiously crafted and introduced.

Aithal (2020) in his article discusses developing quality universities and colleges through institutional restructuring and consolidation. Kumar (2020) gives an overview of NEP 2020 and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the policy with respect to higher education and research. Yenugu (2022) discusses that in order to bring about a drastic change in the educational system, the academic, financial, and logistic commitments from all stakeholders need to be escalated. Govinda (2020) in his article makes a critical examination on the vision of transforming the educational system through foundational literacy and numeracy. Kalyani (2020) discusses NEP in the context of the future

of Indian education. Edukemy team (2023) writes that NEP is in conformity with sustainable development goal -4 and it intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. According to Kumar (2020), India has one sixth of the human workforce representation globally, hence focus to be given for the up gradation of the same through education and training. India's response to this factor has been very slow. After 34 years, with the introduction of NEP 2020, it is sure to achieve sustainable goals by 2030. Muralidharan and colleagues (2022) opines that NEP 2020 is the outcome of the critical analysis of complex issues relating to social , economic and scientific development. Trivedi (2021) in his article makes an extensive study on the challenges in implementing NEP 2020 and sustainable goals 4. Panigrahi and Malik (2020) discuss NEP 2020 as a roadmap to inclusive education.

Anute, Pawar, Ingale, and Ghadage (2022)The National Education Policy was a result of the agreement between educationists with different opinions on the future of education. The policy has ideas which are futuristic and need proper execution for their success. In most of the cases, the faculty members believe that it will deliver its promises as made public.

Brandisauskiene et tal(2021) discusses the well-being of students and found that learning improved by improving student engagement. AIDhaen (2023) stated that HEIs need to redesign their curricula and revisit the graduate attributes in connection with a set of evaluation mechanisms to assess key educational skills. Pakkan,, (2023), discusses the influence of 16 SDGs on each other paving the way for the universities to set a clear goal in attaining sustainable development goals by 2030. Dagar& Sharma (2022)analyzes global educational strategies and policies designed and implemented for refugee groups. It gives an overview of education and lifelong learning approaches that are endorsed by

international agencies and non-governmental institutions.

It is clear from the various discussions that NEP 2020 and SDG 4 is poised to bring about a complete change in the educational scenario. Moving on further, this article finds a discussion on core principles of NEP 2020 and SDG 4 and also the various initiatives of the Indian government that aims to fulfill the goals and targets laid out by the above said policies.

Objectives of the Study

This article is an effort to understand the sustainable development goal 4 (SDG4) and basic provisions of the National Educational Policy 2020. Some of the objective of this article is:

1. To have a greater insight into the Sustainable Development Goal 4 as listed by 2015 United Nation's Agenda for 2030
2. To understand the framework of National Education Policy 2020 and
3. To understand how the NEP 2020 framework would help in the achievement of SDG 4.

Methodology

Secondary data has been used for the preparation of this article. The 2015 United Nations SDG Framework and NEP 2020 document has been used for the understanding and making an analysis the same. Apart from these, data from online sources and various reports relating to SDG and NEP 2020 have been used for the preparation of the article. This article purely reflects the sole opinion of authors based on their understanding of NEP 2020 and SDG 4. .

Analysis and Discussion

Understanding Sustainable Development Goal 4.

SDG-4 is about providing and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. It also aims to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Of late it has been realized that education is the core

focus for any kind of development of a country. Educated population is a boon to any country. To improve the educational status and remove the educational disparities, this goal is envisaged. There are 10 targets that have been listed under this and each of them focus on various areas of education. It is through these targets SDG4 is aimed to achieve by the year 2030. These ten targets are:

4.1 – primary and secondary education for all.

This aims at providing free and quality education for both boys as well as girls at the primary and the secondary level without any kind of differentiation.

4.2 – early childhood care and pre-primary education

Here focus is on providing free access to quality childhood care and pre-primary education. Quality childhood care would enable to prepare children for the next level of education.

4.3 - affordable and quality education

Here the focus is on easy access to all types of education – may it be vocational, technical, tertiary or even university for all men and women.

4.4 – relevant skills for employment /entrepreneurship

This focuses on preparing the men and women with relevant skills required for any kind of job, employment or entrepreneurship.

4.5- bridging gender disparities in education and equal participation

By this it aims at removing the gender disparities at all levels and ensuring an equal participation of both men and women in the education sector. It aims at providing education to people with disabilities and also people and children under vulnerable situations,

4.6 – improving literacy and numeracy among all.

This is poised to improve knowledge, the reading and writing skills along with mathematical competence among men and women.

4.7 – sustainable development

Through this, it is aimed to increase the knowledge and skill levels of the all men and women so as to bring about a sustainable development with ample focus on sustainable lifestyle, gender equality, global citizenship and cultural diversity by ensuring a culture of peace and nonviolence. These targets are planned to be implemented through the following:

4. a – Providing conducive learning environments

This emphasizes on building, upgrading and improving the learning environments that is compatible and conducive for children, disabled and the economically vulnerable.

4. b – through ample scholarships

Here the emphasis is on providing ample scholarships to the economically vulnerable people so as to increase and improve their education.

4. c- improving the quality of teachers

This emphasizes on improving the quality and supply of teachers through proper training.

Analysis and discussion from the 2nd objective

Understanding the basic framework of NEP 2020

This part of the article tries to understand the basic framework of NEP 2020. NEP 2020 is the first educational policy of this century. It proposes to revise, restructure and consolidate the educational system in India. This is in line with the sustainable developmental goals proposed by the United Nations in 2015. It aims to revamp the entire educational system without foregoing the rich culture, heritage and the value systems. It tries to bring back the lost glory which were once exhibited by the Indian ancient universities like – Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila, and Vallabhi. These universities demonstrated the highest level of excellence in research and development. Some of the notable scholars were – Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhatta, Bhaskaracharya, Chanakya, Nagarjuna, Panini and many more. The NEP 2020

policy tries to meet out this lofty target which is broadly defined in the policy document. The policy document details the same in about four parts. The introduction provides a prelude to the same by listing out the basic principles and the vision on which the policy is built. Apart from this Part-1 of the policy is about school education, part 2 is all about higher education, part 3 is about other key areas and part 4 is about the

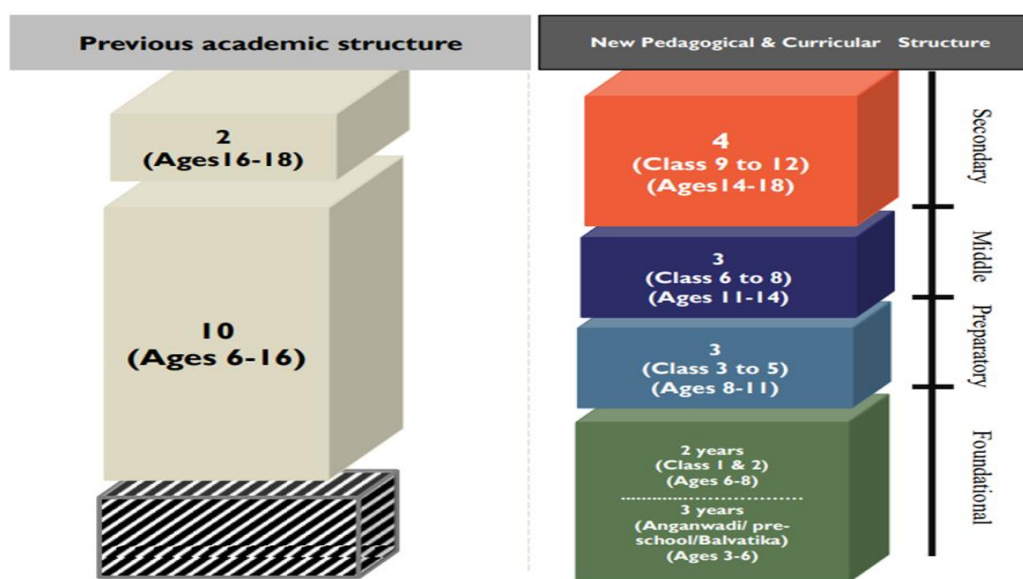
implementation of the same. In this article most of the discussion would be centered on school education and very little on higher education. In order to understand the policy, it is very important to know the fundamental principles on which the policy is built on. The table below highlights the basic principles on which the entire NEP 2020 is framed.

Table :1- Basic Principles of NEP 2020.

1	Recognizing , identifying and fostering - capabilities of student	10	Life skills
2	Foundational and numeracy literacy for all	11	Formative assessments
3	Flexibility	12	Extensive use of technology
4	No hard separation	13	Respect for diversity and local context
5	Multidisciplinary and holistic education	14	Equity and inclusion
6	Emphasis on conceptual understanding	15	Synergy in curriculum
7	Creativity and critical thinking	16	Teachers and faculty at the heart of learning process
8	Ethics and Human & constitutional values	17	Light but tight regulatory framework
9	Promoting multilingualism and power of language	18	Continuous review

Source : NEP 2020 document.

Under NEP 2020 school education is on a verge of complete revamp and restructuring. The existing 10+ 2 structure is being replaced by a 4 tier structure of 5+3+3+4 years.



Source : NEP 2020 policy document

The above figure depicts a comparison between the existing structure and the new structure. Under this new structure the school going age is divided into 4 groups :

4. Foundational stage – which is of a 5 year duration starting for 3 years to 8 years. This first 3 years a student would be admitted to an Anganwadi/ Balvatika / preschool. The next two years would be class 1 and 2.
5. Preparatory stage – this stage is for about 3 years representing class 3 to 5. The students in these classes would be 8-11 years.
6. Middle stage – this is again of 3 years duration. The representing classes are 6-8 and the age group is 11-14 years.
7. Secondary stage – this stage is for a period of 4 years. The representing classes are 9-12 and the age group is 14-18 years.

In each of these stages special attention is given to the progressive development of the child in terms of the physical, mental, cognitive and emotional wellbeing.

As far as school education is concerned, NEP 2020 proposes the following clauses to bring about overall development of school children.

1. Early childhood care and education(ECCE).

It is a well-known fact that 85% of a child's brain stimulation and development happens at the earlier ages. This has been well understood by policy makers and there is a great effort initiated to provide complete access to the developmental activities of ECCE. ECCE tries to bring about a holistic development of a child through flexible , activity based, game based, inquiry based and fun filled activity based learning. It focuses on the development of social skills, sensitivity, etiquettes, ethical behavior, values systems, personal hygiene, cleanliness and many more.

2. Foundation literacy and Numeracy

The focus here is to make everyone capable of reading, writing and comprehending the same. Key components of foundational literacy include oral language, decoding,

fluency in reading and comprehension, as well writing skills. Numeracy is about making them capable of performing basic mathematical calculations like addition, subtraction and others. Key components of foundational numeracy are numbers and operations, shapes and special understanding, measurement and data handling. This would help them for their basic survival.

3. Reducing dropouts and ensuring universal access to education at all levels.

Even though the Gross Enrollment Ratio among children shows an increase, but there is a greater percentage of dropout after class 5. Hence this refers to an initiative to reduce the dropouts from the school and provide easy access to education. This is intended to bring the socially and economically backward groups into the mainstream.

4. Curriculum and pedagogy in schools

This focuses on the restructuring of the curriculum and pedagogy by the adoption of the 5+3+3+4 structure. It intends to strengthen the foundational stage by including Anganwadis /Balvatikas / preschools under the mainstream, improving the pedagogy, including activity based learning with focus on a holistic development of the child. The idea of strengthening is stage is to prepare the children for the next phase.

5. Teachers

Improving the quality of the teachers is the next target. Right from the foundational stage to the secondary stage efforts to train and bring in qualified teachers has been made. Special training facilities through online and offline facilities have been planned so as to make the teachers capable of providing a better learning outcome for the students.

6. Equitable and inclusive education

This part of the policy tries to bridge the social gaps and wishes to provide a fair and equitable chance for every child to be included in the educational system. Previous

policies tried to bridge the gender specific and socio-economic gaps to a certain extent, but still disparities exist. The gaps are quite visible at the middle and the secondary stages of education and are prominent among the socially and economically backward groups. These exist in the form of gender, socio-cultural, geographical, disability and other vulnerable disparities. The gross enrollment ratio at the foundation level and the primary level seems to be high, but at the secondary level it falls drastically. This trend is noticed among the various socially and economically disadvantaged group identified above. Hence there is a need to give importance to these categories and bring these underprivileged groups to the main stream of the educational system.

7. Efficient resourcing and effective governance – this focuses around easy access to schools and education for all. It also insists on effective monitoring in terms of right and trained faculty, enough and more school counselors and teachers, adequate resources, adequate

facilities, enough facilities for children with disabilities, skills lab, science labs and more

8. Standard setting and accreditation for school educators.-Focus on setting a standard for performance of schools so as to emphasize on the quality of education. Schools would be empowered to come up with creative and innovative practices in education, no restrictions would be imposed if it strives to keep up the quality of education. As of now there is only a single body, Directorate of School Education taking care of education system. This policy emphasizes on setting up accreditation for schools to keep up the quality of school education.

Analysis and discussion from the 3rd Objective

This section gives a glimpse of few initiatives of the Indian Government that would help in the achievement of the sustainable goals in education,

Sl. No	Sustainable development goal-4	NEP 2020 principles / clauses	Governmental initiatives to to achieve SDG 4
	4.1 – primary and secondary education for all	Principle - Equity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Right to Education (RTE)(2009) provides free education to all from 6-14 years of age. ○ For physically challenged it is extended to 18 years of age. ○ 25% reservation for students from socially and economically backward sections in private schools. ○ Sarva ShikshaAbhiyan (2001)-universal access to education for all especially the girls and other economically disadvantaged group.
	4.2 – early childhood care and pre-primary education	Clause-1 early childhood care and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Objective is to provide free, safe and quality education to every child in the age group of 3-6 years. ○ Revamping of the 10+2 structure to 5+3+3+4 curriculum design. ○ Excellent care in terms food, emotional, social physical, mental and cognitive development. ○ Innovative and activity based learning bring about stimulation and development of the brain. ○ Mid-day meal scheme for improving the enrollment ○ AyushmanBharath Scheme –launched in 2018 providing health coverage of 5 lakh rupees per family per year.

4.3 - affordable and quality education	Clause 3- Universal education for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RashtriyaMadhyaminShikshaAbhiyan(2009) focuses on quality education based on logical , critical, creative and innovative curriculum. ○ RashtriyaUchachatarSikshaAbhiyan (RUSA, 2013) to be continued till 2026. This funds universities and colleges in State to provide free access, equity and excellence in education. 	
4.4 – relevant skills for employment /entrepreneurship	Clause 4 - Holistic education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Curriculum Framework (2005) Learner centric education. ○ Atal Innovation Mission (AIM, 2016) aims to promote entrepreneurship. ○ VigyanPrathibha (2017) for students of class 8-10, in particular for socially and economically disadvantaged groups to enable them to learn science and mathematics. ○ National Sports Talent Scheme (2017) to encourage students of 8-14 years with a greater aptitude for sports and to train them to reach their goals. 	
4.5- bridging gender disparities in education and equal participation .	Clause 6 – equitable and inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Child Labor Project Scheme (NCLP, 1988) tries to rehabilitate children working under hazardous condition to the education mainstream. Under this scheme they are provided non formal/ bridge education/ skills/ vocational training. They are also provided facilities of mid –day meal, stipend every month and adequate health care too. ○ Scholarships – Pragathi scholarships for girls, for scheduled caste students upto 12th class, Special scholarship scheme for north eastern region, financial assistance schemes for girls in certain states. ○ National fellowships for students with disabilities - covers about 200 students every year enabling them to pursue MPhil and PhD. ○ National Scholarships for persons with disabilities – financial assistance for pursuing higher and technical education. ○ Udaan Scholarships for girls constituted by CBSE for improving Science and Mathematics and increasing enrollment of girls in engineering. ○ Pre-matric scholarships – ○ BetiBachhao and BetiPadhao 	
4.6 – improving literacy and numeracy among all.	Clause -2 foundational literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NIPUN Bharath – launched in 2021 aims to improve the foundational literacy and numeracy of school going students of class 4-5 by 2026-27. ○ New India literacy programme (NILP) launched in 2022-23 is for 5 years, till 2026-27, is aimed at improving the foundational literacy and numeracy. Foundational literacy and numeracy, vocational skills, basic education , critical skills and continuing education. 	

4.7 sustainable development	–	Clause 4 – holistic developmen t – Equity and inclusion principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SamagraShiksha Scheme – launched in 2018 brings about holistic development of schools. Focus in on holistic development through - administrative reforms, inclusion girl education, digital education, skill development, sports education and funding.
4.a–Providing conducive learning environments			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SWAYAM - introduced by the Govt. to provide quality education to all , particularly the socially disadvantaged. ○ SWAYAM PRABHA - uses 34 DTH educational channels using GSAT-15 for providing education and better reach.
4. b – through ample scholarships			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To improve the education status among students , there are various schemes floated by the government . There are initiatives by the Central government , the State government and the Higher Education bodies like UGC and AICTE. Some of the scholarship schemes aiming at sustainable education in India are listed below: ○ Central Government Scholarship schemes: ○ Ministry of Minority affairs provides -Pre-matric scholarship for minorities and specially abled , Post matric scholarship for minorities and specially abled scholarships as well as Begum HazratMahal National Scholarship. ○ Department of Empowerment of persons with disabilities- provides scholarships for top class education of students with disability and scholarships for top class education for SC students. Pre and post matric scholarships for disabled students. ○ Ministry of social justice and empowerment - provides top class education for Sc Students as well as PM Yashasvi scheme for other backward caste (OBC), economically backward class (EBC) and denotified tribe (DNT) students. ○ Ministry of labor and employment- provides pre matric and post matric financial assistance to the wards of Beedi / Cine /LSDM/ IOMC category of workers. ○ Ministry of tribal affairs - facilitates education of scheduled tribe students through the National Fellowship and scholarship programme. ○ Department of school education provides national means cum merit scholarships. ○ Department of Higher education provides the central sector scheme for students of higher education ○ Ministry of Home affairs - has the Prime Minister scholarships for Central Armed police forces and Assam rifles. It also has Prime Ministers scholarships

			<p>for wards of Police officers martyred during an attack.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Ministry of Railways provides scholarships for RPF/RPSF. ○ The North Eastern Council aids the students of North East with the NEC merit scholarships. ○ All India Council for Technical Education- AICTE ○ Pragathi Scholarships - introduced in 2014 to provide education support to girl child in technical education. It is implemented by AICTE. ○ BalikaSamridhiYojana - initiated in 1997 to improve the community perspective towards educating girl child, their development and welfare . Mostly given to families below the poverty line. ○ SAKSHAM scheme is introduced by AICTE for students with disabilities to pursue technical education. ○ Swanath Scholarship Scheme- This scheme is for specially abled students pursuing technical diploma or technical degree courses. ○ For promotion of research Dr. S. Radhakrishnan doctoral fellowships and AICTE PhD scholarships are introduced. ○ University Grants Commission - UGC ○ Indira Gandhi PG Scholarship introduced by UGC to single girl children applying for postgraduate programmes. ○ PG Scholarship for university rank holders for 1st and 2nd positions. ○ PG scholarship for SC/ST students for pursuing a professional course.
	4. c- improving the quality of teachers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quality improvement programmes for teachers to do MTech and PhD programmes in leading institutions like IITs and NITs in India. ○ PanditMadan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching for improving the professional skills of teachers. Aids in curriculum planning, design, implementation and assessment. This also tries to provide solutions for various problems faced by teachers. ○ Setting up of Districts Institutes of Education and Training DIETs. ○ Strengthening of State Councils for Educational Research and training(SCERT)

Conclusion

This article focuses on the importance of education as laid out by National Educational Policy 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4. Both these are poised to bring about development of a nation with

focus on inclusive and sustainable development in social , economic and scientific domains. Apart from providing a broader insight into SDG4 and NEP 2020, this article provides information on various initiatives, schemes and scholarship

introduced by the State and Central governments, educational and research institutions for promoting, improving and developing the educational landscape. The list of initiatives and schemes discussed here is not a complete and an exhaustive list. There are other schemes too, the authors tried to put a few among them here.

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