

## **Meaning of Universalisation in the Light of Draft National Education Policy (2019)**

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The Draft National Educational Policy (2019) has proposed a number of suggestions for school education which, if adopted has got far reaching implications one of which is restructuring the composition of school education. At present in India Primary education level consists of Grade I to V (corresponding age-group 6+ to 10+ years), Upper Primary level consists of Grades VI to VIII (age-group 11+ to 13+ years), Secondary (Grades IX & X/14+ to 15+ years) and Higher Secondary Level of education (XI & XII/16+ to 17+ years). Universalisation in India means universal access (school facilities to all), universal participation (all relevant age group children enrolled), universal retention (meaning all those who enter in to the system retain and transit from one level of education to another) and universal quality of education (satisfying criteria of minimum levels of learning). Instead of present levels, the draft NPE (2019) proposed (i) Foundational Stage of School Education (3 years of Pre-primary education including Grades 1 and 2 with corresponding age-group 3 to 8 years) (ii) Preparatory phase consisting of 3 years i.e. Grades 3, 4 and 5 (iii) Middle School Education of 3 years (Grades 6, 7 and 8) and (iv) Secondary Education phase of 4 years consisting Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. The corresponding clientele age-groups of these phases would be: Phase I (3+ to 7+ years), Phase II (8+ to 10+years), Phase III (11+ to 13+ years) and Phase IV (14+ to 17+ years). New phases, if adopted, would change the meaning of universal primary education. A new set of indicators would be required to be developed and adopted. At present universalisation in India at an educational level is viewed through a set of indicators such as, Gross and Net Enrolment Ratio, Age-specific & Adjusted Net Enrolment Ratio, Grade-to-Grade drop out, promotion and repetition rate, average annual dropout rate, retention & transition rates and a set of quality of education related indicators to view learners ability to read and write. In case if the proposed structure is adopted, meaning of the most of the indicators and its implication for planning universalisation will change. Instead of present 6+ to 18+ years age group, the new system would have 3+ to 18+ as its clientele; thus meaning school education would have 17 years instead of present 14 years. New indicators for Foundation and Preparatory Phase would need to be developed on the line of existing set of indicators. However, there would not be any implication for third phase i.e. Middle School education which consists of Grades 6, 7 and 8 which is similar to the existing Upper Primary level of Education and Phase 4<sup>th</sup> which is combination of the existing Secondary and Higher Secondary levels of education. For Universal foundational Stage, one would be required to compute Gross, Net and other enrolment based indicators for the corresponding 3 to 8 years clientele population. To attain universalisation at this phase of education means enrolling all children of age-group 3 to 8 years in

the corresponding classes i.e. Pre-primary to Grade 1 and 2 will be the sufficient condition but that itself will not serve the purpose unless all those who enter into the system through first year of 3 years of Pre-primary education retain in the system, move from one grade to another and finally reach and complete Grade 2. To achieve goal of universalisation, the basic condition would be to enrol all children of age 3 for which entry rate would be required to be computed. A 100 percent entry rate (net) will be required to achieve the goal of universal foundation. Grade-to-grade dropout, promotion and repetition, if any will be required to compute between each of 5 years of foundation stage. In addition, transition rate from Foundational stage to Preparatory phase, Preparatory to Middle school education phase and from Middle school education phase to Secondary education phase as well as retention rate at all these phases will be required to be computed. Retention rate presents information about the retaining capacity of the system which is unless brought to 100; the dream of universalisation may not be cherished. Similarly, enrolment ratios at Preparatory phase consisting Grades 3, 4 & 5 with the corresponding clientele age group 8+to 10+ years would be required to be worked out. Universalisation at this phase mean all children of age group 8 to 10 years are enrolled in corresponding grades i.e. Grades 3, 4 & 5 but that would depends upon how many phase one graduates (those who successfully reach Grade 2) system will be producing and transit to the first grade i.e. Grade 3 of next phase i.e. Phase 2, Preparatory phase. It may also be of interest to know that to compute enrolment based indicators enrolment in absolute form and relevant age-specific child population is required. Though enrolment in the latest year is available from the U-DISE but the age-specific population is available only from the Census of India which is latest available for 2011. Until 2001 Census, the Office of the Registrar General of India used to provide projected population annually but the same based up to the 2011 Census population was never provided in the absence of which enrolment ratio at different levels of education may be termed as indicative (GER at Primary 95.12 percent & Upper Primary level, 90.73 percent) as the child population used in computing GER & NER is estimated based on the projected population based on up to the 2001 Census. All through 2012 to current year, enrolment ratios at all levels of education are based on provisional set of child population. Once the actual child population is available, the enrolment ratio may dramatically change. At disaggregated levels such as, district and block levels, official population projections are rarely available in the absence of which it is not an easy task to compute enrolment based indicators at these levels. School Education Department of the MHRD must approach the Office of the Registrar General of India to ensure timely availability of 2021 Census child population both at the all-India and State and district levels and in subsequent years in the absence of which it is not possible to reliably compute enrolment ratio indicators which has got serious implications for planning universalisation. The draft policy document also envisage

increasing GER at Higher Education level from present 25 percent to 50 percent by 2035 meaning doubling enrolment during the period 2017 to 2035 which may not be realised unless the efficiency of school education system is improved to significant effect as enrolment in higher education level is not only a function of 18 to 22 population but would largely depend upon number of higher secondary graduates the system will be producing. Needless to mention that of the total 123.8 million enrolment in Primary classes, about 6 percent children dropped out from the system before completion of Primary level thus influencing enrolment in subsequent levels of education i.e. upper primary and secondary and higher secondary levels of education all which will eventually affect number of secondary graduates that would be available for higher education. In view of this, the draft National Policy 2019 emphasised the need to achieve access and participation in free and compulsory quality school education for all children in the age group of 3 to 18 years by 2030 for which it envisaged all out of school, never enrolled and dropped out children back to school as early as possible and to further prevent all them from dropping out. To achieve this, the draft policy suggested (i) sufficient infrastructure at all levels from pre-primary school through Grade 12; and (ii) to achieve universal participation in schools by carefully tracking students to ensure that they are enrolled in and attending schools. The draft Policy (2019) also advocates that the Free and Compulsory aspects of Right to Education (RTE) Act must be enforced and extended through Grade 12 to all children up to the age of 18 is termed welcome and timely suggestion but the moot question one may ask is whether RTE Act enacted in 2009 has been truly implemented in its spirit?. U-DISE data suggest that only 12 percent of the 1.5 million schools imparting school education in the Country have all the 10 facilities as was envisaged in the Right to Free and Compulsory Education 2009 Act majority of schools without such facilities are the Government run schools. In addition, though declined but still a good number of unrecognised schools are functioning across the country which is evident from the U-DISE data. As per the RTE Act, all unenrolled, never enrolled and dropped out children are to be identified by the local authorities annually and train them (3 months to 2 years) to make them to sit in the age appropriate grade in view of which in the recent years there are no target date/year to achieve the goal of Universal Primary/School education. The Student Database Management in-sync with U-DISE launched in 2016-17 could have helped, as proposed in the draft policy, in moving towards developing a Child-Tracking System but unfortunately for unknown reasons, the same despite successfully collecting individual student records of more than 210 million students discontinued abruptly in the following years. The Draft NPE (2019) also suggested that the one of the premier institutions i.e. NIEPA be strengthened and all the data gathering, analysis and dissemination work be consolidated and expanded there, under a new Central Education Statistics Division (CESD) as an independent autonomous entity with NIEPA.

While the draft policy was being formulated, U-DISE being managed by NIEPA over 2.5 decades was silently but swiftly shifted to the School Education Department of the Ministry of HRD and is presently being managed by NIC. Hope that the proposal to set up CESD will find place in the final NPE and NIEPA will again play an important role in strengthening Educational Management Information System not only in case of the School Education but for the entire education sector as envisaged in the draft NPE (2019). Once modifications suggested in draft find a place in the final policy document, officers those who are engaged in data analysis and district plans will be required to understand meaning of universalisation in the changed scenario for which adequate modifications will be required in the planning strategies, if any under the Government of India's flagship programme i.e. Samagra Shiksha!!