



New Education Policy 2020 and Social Work Interventions

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Abstract: “Social work is a professional practice that promotes social change, development, and empowerment. It focuses on addressing challenges and fostering well-being within individuals and communities. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), social work “promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being”. The field integrates theories of human behaviour and social systems, utilizing various methods such as case work, group work, and most importantly, community organization to bring about societal improvements.”

Keywords: Social workers, New Education Policy 2020, Role of Social Worker, community engagement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), equity and inclusion, Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), counselling and support services, school-home partnerships, teacher training, policy advocacy in India.

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Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 indeed represents a significant reform in India's education landscape. The NEP aims to transform the current educational framework to meet the demands of the 21st century while integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It envisions a high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education system that equips learners with the skills needed to succeed in a fast-evolving global environment. By focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy, the policy seeks to close accessibility and equity gaps, particularly for disadvantaged socio-economic groups (SEDGs), and promote holistic, integrated, and experiential learning.

The Education Policy places significant importance on nurturing the creative potential of every individual. It is founded on the belief that education should enhance not only cognitive abilities—encompassing both the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and higher-order skills like critical thinking and problem-solving—but also social, ethical, and emotional skills and attributes.

The education system aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals who can think and act rationally, while also embodying compassion, empathy, courage, resilience, scientific reasoning, and creative imagination, grounded in strong ethical values. Its goal is to produce engaged, productive citizens who contribute to building an equitable, inclusive, and diverse society as outlined in our Constitution. The policy is viewed as a framework of guidelines designed to achieve balanced outcomes through systematic decision-making. The National Education Policy 2020 envisions a

transformative and inclusive shift in the educational landscape, emphasizing ‘Equitable and Inclusive Education’ to ensure that no child is denied educational opportunities due to their background or socio-cultural identity. It addresses the needs of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including disabled children, women and transgender individuals, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, minorities, and children in vulnerable situations, to enhance learning for all. This policy seeks to close the social gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school education. Inclusive education is now seen as a necessity rather than a privilege.

The New Education Policy (NEP) in India is a transformative initiative aimed at reforming the educational sector. As the NEP's implementation moves forward, social workers will play an important role in ensuring its success. Social workers, with their experience in community participation, advocacy, counselling, and support services, can help to create an inclusive, equitable, and empowering educational environment for all stakeholders.

The National Education Policy 2020 seeks an inclusive and systemic transformation to the educational system. It emphasizes on 'Equitable and Inclusive Education', which aligns with the principle that no kid should be denied educational opportunities because of their background or socio-cultural characteristics. Prioritising RTE 2009 and RPWD 2016, the new NEP includes a number of creative ideas for making education more inclusive. Inclusive education is no longer a luxury; rather, it is an absolute necessity.

Social work plays a crucial role in achieving the objectives of NEP 2020. The policy clearly acknowledges the value of trained social workers within the educational system. According to the NEP, social workers are essential for linking schools with communities to promote inclusive education and equity for all students. They are responsible for identifying and overcoming barriers to learning, particularly for marginalized groups, and ensuring that students remain engaged in school. The presence of trained social workers is vital for monitoring student attendance, assessing learning progress, and addressing dropout rates.

Social Work Role in New Education Policy 2020

This paper examines the role of social workers in light of the New Education Policy 2020. It covers aspects such as community engagement, equity and inclusion, counselling and support services, enhancing school-home partnerships, teacher training and professional development, as well as policy advocacy and research. By effectively carrying out these responsibilities, social workers can help bring the NEP's vision to life, fostering quality education and holistic development for all learners.

According to NEP 2020, the goal of education is to nurture well-rounded individuals who can think and act rationally while embodying compassion, empathy, courage, resilience, scientific reasoning, and creative imagination, all grounded in strong ethical values. The policy aims to produce engaged and innovative citizens who contribute to building a pluralistic, inclusive, and equitable society as envisioned in our Constitution.

The New Education Policy (NEP) in India is a transformative initiative aimed at reforming the educational sector. As the implementation of the NEP proceeds, social workers play a vital role in guaranteeing its smooth execution.

The New Education Policy (NEP) in India, implemented in 2020, is a progressive reform aiming at modernizing the education system to satisfy students' changing demands. With an emphasis on holistic development, equal access, and inclusive education, the NEP has the potential to revolutionize the country's educational landscape. However, the successful execution of such a comprehensive program necessitates the participation of many stakeholders, including social workers. Social workers, with their skills in community participation, lobbying, counselling, and support services, are well positioned to help the NEP be implemented effectively.

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Indian government, seeks to transform the education system into one that is more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned with global standards. While NEP encompasses a wide range of education reforms, it also offers substantial opportunities for the field of social work. Here's how the NEP impacts and defines the scope of social work:

1. Focus on Equity and Inclusion

Social Workers' Role: The NEP emphasizes ensuring universal access to education, particularly for marginalized and underrepresented communities such as SC/ST, OBC, minorities, girls, and differently-abled students. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers will play a crucial role in advocating for equitable education, supporting community engagement, and addressing the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in accessing quality education.

2. Generic Roles of School Social Workers

Every child is unique, and learning processes vary significantly among individuals. While children's development follows a general pattern and they typically pass through major stages, there are distinct differences in development across various domains. Not all children reach developmental milestones at the same time, and these individual variations arise from multiple factors. The first eight years of a child's life are particularly critical for growth and development. Identifying children who are 'at risk' for developmental delays and disabilities early on is essential for timely intervention. Such interventions can effectively address both developmental delays and disabilities. In this context, social workers play a vital role in the following ways:

- **Positive Attitude:** Attitude is one of the most significant impediments to inclusion. Teachers, as cornerstones of the educational system, can help pupils develop a good attitude toward inclusive education. This demands instructors to be not only sensitized to inclusion, but also adequately trained for it.
- **School Preparedness:** Inclusive education can only thrive if schools are adequately prepared to meet the needs of children with disabilities. NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of school readiness. Key elements include establishing resource centers in every school complex, hiring school social workers and special educators, and implementing individualized support programs—all of which contribute to creating an inclusive environment.
- **Resources & Support:** Schools must offer assistive and supportive devices, along with other resources tailored to individual needs. A clear strategy is established to support NEP 2020. The resource center is designed to assist not only the school but also parents who are homeschooling. State support is essential for both schools and parents to ensure quality education.
- **Individualised Programme:** No two children are the same, and the same applies to children with disabilities. Each child with challenges has distinct needs based on their specific impairments.
- **Flexible Curriculum:** These children have significantly different needs and abilities from their peers, which is why we cannot create a fixed curriculum for them. Mood fluctuations, comprehension challenges, and a variety of other reasons can all make following a uniform curriculum difficult.

3. Mental Health and Well-Being

Social Workers' Role: The NEP acknowledges the importance of mental health by recommending the appointment of counsellors and well-being support in schools. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers, with training in mental health, can work as counsellors or mental health professionals within educational settings to provide support, handle issues like anxiety, depression, and behavioural problems among students.

NEP Connection:

- Counsellors and social workers play a vital role in addressing students' emotional well-being (Section 6.20).
- Integration of mental health awareness into the school curriculum to build empathy and resilience (Section 6.20).



4. Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities

Social Workers' Role: NEP promotes inclusive education for students with special needs by ensuring teacher training and infrastructure development. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers can act as advocates and facilitators for these students, working with families, schools, and other professionals to ensure that their educational needs are met and their rights are protected.

5. Community Mobilization in Education

Social Workers' Role: NEP emphasizes the role of the community and civil society organizations in supporting the education system, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. Social workers can be involved in community-based educational programs, engaging local communities to participate in the development and monitoring of schools, thus ensuring a participatory approach. Social workers can facilitate community participation in schools, thereby addressing issues like low attendance, lack of infrastructure, and parental involvement in education.

Community Mobilization and Awareness



6. Focus on Vocational Education and Skill Development

Social Workers' Role: The NEP encourages the integration of vocational education from an early stage, focusing on employability and practical skills. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers can support vocational education programs by helping students, particularly from marginalized groups, connect with employment opportunities, counselling, and ensuring that skill-based education is accessible and effective.

7. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Social Workers' Role: NEP underlines the importance of early childhood education, ensuring children receive a strong foundation in their early years. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers can engage in promoting and supporting ECCE initiatives, particularly in communities where access to early education is limited. Their role can include training caregivers, running early intervention programs, and conducting community outreach to improve awareness about early childhood education.

8. Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers:

One of the challenges in education is the socio-economic factors that prevent children from attending school. Social workers, with their training in understanding social dynamics, can help bridge these gaps by connecting families to resources like scholarships, nutritional programs, and counselling.



9. Strengthening School-Home Partnerships:

Effective partnership between schools and families is critical to student achievement. Social workers can help build good school-home partnerships by offering parent education programs, making home visits, and arranging workshops to increase family involvement. They can help instructors and parents communicate more effectively, increasing mutual understanding and collaboration. Social workers can also help parents navigate the educational system, resolve problems, and access resources to encourage active engagement in their children's education.

10. Teacher Training and Development

Social Workers' Role: NEP calls for continuous professional development of teachers and educational staff. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers can collaborate with educational institutions to offer support services such as workshops on classroom management, dealing with trauma in students, and integrating inclusive practices in teaching.

11. Addressing Dropouts and Re-Enrolment through Community Engagement

Social workers work with local NGOs to identify out-of-school children, implement catch-up programs, and provide support for re-entry into formal education.

- Social workers track and engage with students who have dropped out or are at risk of doing so (Section 3.3).
- Collaborating with communities to ensure re-enrolment and reduce dropout rates.

12. Engagement with Civil Society

Social workers will partner with civil society organizations to carry out interventions in schools, particularly in regions with high dropout rates. These interventions may include vocational training, life skills programs, and workshops aimed at enhancing the overall educational experience of students

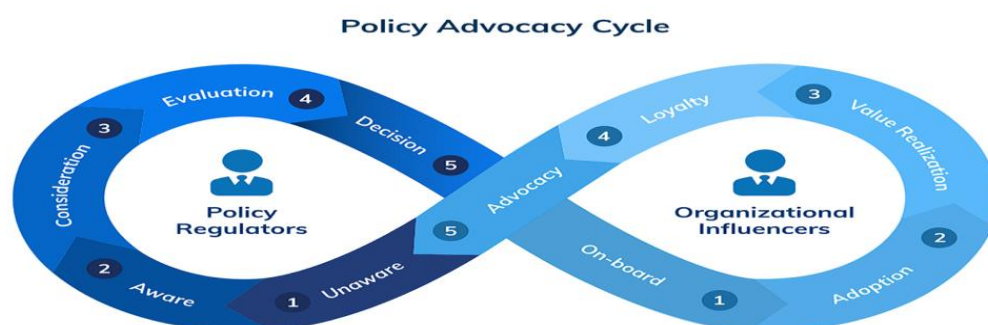
- Collaboration with civil society organizations to deploy trained social workers in schools (Section 3.3).
- NGOs assist in providing additional support for children from disadvantaged communities and those with disabilities.



NGOs and social workers collaborate to create special education programs for students with disabilities and ensure that they have access to adequate resources.

13. Research and Policy Advocacy

Social Workers' Role: NEP places a strong emphasis on research in education to inform policymaking and practice. **Scope for Social Workers:** Social workers can engage in research on educational inequities, the effectiveness of educational reforms, and child welfare, advocating for policies that address social issues in the education sector. Social workers, by virtue of their deep involvement in community issues, are well-placed to advocate for policy reforms and ensure that local governments and educational authorities implement the NEP in a manner that reaches the most disadvantaged sections of society.



- Research on measures effective for marginalized groups, like providing bicycles for girls and other methods to increase school participation (Section 6.5).
- Social workers collecting data on adult education needs and connecting with Adult Education Centres (Section 21.8).

The term “Social Worker” is discussed 10 times in the NEP 2020 policy document under different sections. We will discuss and understand the scope of social work in school settings in light of NEP 2020.

Social workers contribute to improved governance through School Complex Management Committees (Section 7.7).

Integration of counsellors, social workers, and other staff across school complexes enhances efficiency in providing support services (Section 7.5).

Example: Social workers participate in school governance, ensuring that all stakeholders, including teachers and local communities, work together for improved outcomes.

Core Methods and interventions in Social Work for NEP, 2020

- **Casework:** A micro-level intervention where social workers work directly with individuals or families to resolve personal and systemic issues.

NEP Connection:

- Social workers address children's health and nutrition in schools (Section 2.9).
- Support for students falling behind or dropping out (Section 3.3).
- Social workers engage with families to ensure school attendance and learning.

Example: Social workers help students overcome malnutrition and ensure regular health check-ups through personalized case management.

- **Group Work:** Facilitating groups of individuals to support collective problem-solving, mutual aid, and community-building.

Facilitating group processes to support problem-solving and community-building.

NEP Connection:

- Establishment of school complexes for shared resources and building vibrant teacher communities (Section 5.10).
- Encouraging collaborative learning environments through the sharing of counsellors and social workers across school complexes (Section 7.7).

Example: Social workers and counsellors work with student groups to improve attendance and learning outcomes, especially in urban poor areas (Section 6.5).

- **Community Organization:** A key focus of this presentation. This involves mobilizing communities for collective action to improve societal conditions. Social workers engage in building community capacity, promoting social justice, and creating networks to address social, economic, and educational challenges.

Mobilizing communities for collective action to address societal challenges.

NEP Connection:

- Involvement of social workers in ensuring school attendance and quality education through community engagement (Section 3.3).
- School complexes promote community support, sharing resources for effective learning and governance (Sections 7.5, 7.7).
- Building inclusive school culture through collaboration with social workers to remove biases and stereotypes (Section 6.20).

Example: Social workers organize community drives to improve school attendance, engage parents, and create inclusive environments for marginalized students.

The NEP highlights the appointment of well-trained social workers in schools to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as SEDGs, ensuring they have access to quality education. These social workers will work alongside teachers, parents, and communities to:

Promote Universal Participation: Social workers will play a key role in ensuring that all children attend school and achieve their educational potential. They will engage in tracking students' progress and intervening where children are at risk of dropping out.

Support Inclusive Learning: By collaborating with counsellors, social workers will help create an inclusive environment that is responsive to the diverse needs of students, especially those with disabilities or from socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

Community Engagement: Social workers will be instrumental in community outreach, ensuring that the entire community is involved in supporting the educational goals of the NEP. They will work on awareness campaigns, mobilization efforts, and creating support networks that ensure continuous education for every child.

The role of the social worker is to help and develop creativity and critical thinking to encourage logical decision-making and innovation; ethics and human and constitutional values such as empathy, respect for others, cleanliness, courtesy, democratic spirit, spirit of service, respect for public property, scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, equality, and justice; and life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience. A social worker can help strengthen school-home partnerships, provide inclusive education for students with disabilities, focus on vocational education and skill development, and promote mental health and well-being. He must play an active role as a councillor, facilitate, and train in bringing about behavior change if necessary through phased counselling.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 offers significant opportunities for social workers in the education sector by emphasizing mental health, inclusive education, equity, and community engagement. Social work professionals play a crucial role in supporting and implementing these reforms to ensure that the policy benefits all segments of society. Effective execution of the New Education Policy in India hinges on the active participation of social workers. With their expertise in community engagement, advocacy, counselling, and support services, social workers can greatly contribute to the transformative objectives of the NEP. By engaging with

communities, promoting equity and inclusion, providing counselling and support, enhancing school-home partnerships, facilitating teacher training, and participating in policy advocacy and research, social workers can help cultivate an inclusive, equitable, and empowering educational environment. They can help shape an education system that nurtures each individual's potential and lays the groundwork for a brighter future for generations to come. Additionally, social workers are essential in addressing students' academic, physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Bridging the Gap: Social workers play a vital role in bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that marginalized communities have equitable access to education.

Collaborative Efforts by working with schools, communities, NGOs, and government agencies, social workers play a critical role in creating inclusive, supportive educational environments.

****Empowerment and Equity**:** NEP 2020 highlights the crucial role of social work in promoting respect, inclusion, and equity within education, positioning social workers as key agents of social change in the education system. They can greatly enhance the successful implementation of NEP 2020 by encouraging an inclusive, supportive, and community-centered approach to education.

NEP 2020 highlights the increasing need for trained social workers in schools to address students' well-being, learning challenges, and social integration.

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