

## **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR RETENTION OF GIRLS IN SECONDARY / HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP-2020**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The draft National Policy of Education has been introduced in 2019 and has been approved in 2020. In India, historically, there has always been a need for special emphasis on secondary/higher education for girls. This paper examines the scope of girl child education outlined in NPE-2020 and proposes a few practical approaches to help the increase of enrolment and retention of girl students in secondary and higher education as well as to ingrain students with the right attitudes towards education and towards professional careers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *NEP-2020, Female Literacy, Gender Sensitization, Self-Defense, Role Models, Career Counseling, STEM, Technology, Equal Opportunities*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The National Policy of Education (NPE), 2020 attributes the character of knowledge to that of a mobius strip. “The motive of mobius strip symbolizes the perpetual, developing and live nature of knowledge – that which has no beginning and which has no end”. Although this is true of knowledge, the hurdles that encompass the educational scenario of our nation do not allow education to become a mobius strip, rather this perpetuity needs to be broken down, visualized so that new vistas can be opened and the issues confronting us from several decades in the field of education can be tackled. This applies to girl child education too.

The percentage of female population in India is 48.04% compared to 51.96% male population (as on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and as per UN World population prospects, 2019). The overall literacy rate works out to be 64.8% wherein the male literacy rate is 75.3% and that for females is 53.7% showing a gap of 21.6% percentage points the gap between the literacy rates has been persisting at the national level for several years. The literacy gap is more in the rural areas. In recent years India’s female literacy has gone up but is still 22% behind the world average (Amit Kapoor and AnirudhhDuttaa, 2019).

The state of education of women in India continues to be dismal although they constitute nearly 50% of the population and the fundamental right of free compulsory education to all children under 86<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution of India seems to have been unattained. Low education in turn leads to low self-esteem and reduced role of women in the workforce. Providing access and providing financial recourse (affordability) become necessary for encouraging the girl child in all stages of education. Certain practical measures for women education are required so that women education receives support in all stages.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of this paper are

- To understand the scope of girls' education outlined in NPE.
- To suggest practical measure that could help overcome the barriers for girl education.

**Research Method:** The data has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Most of the data collected has been from secondary sources i.e., journals, magazines and websites.

### **NPE 2020 and Girl Child Education:**

NPE has not given special emphasis on girl child education probably envisaging that ensuring universal access and retention in education at all levels may include girls. It only mentions that the safety of girls should be taken care of while developing new facilities in unserved locations and while providing transport and hostel facilities. In the context of literacy there seems to be a special emphasis placed on women's literacy by generating large scale public awareness. The draft policy extended the right to education act to assure availability of free and compulsory education from pre-school through grade 12. The draft policy seems to be aware of gender imbalance among school teachers and girl students but offers little recourse in addressing these issues. When faced with criticism about lack of focus on girl child development, the planning was left to Ministry of Women and Child Development and Health and Family Welfare.

### **The Hurdles in Women Education**

The hurdles in the path of a girl child to achieve secondary/higher education are many. Initiatives like SarvaSiksha Abhiyan (SSA) seem to have worked partially in developing literacy in the girl child but a lot needs to be done. The dropout rate seems to be high for girls at secondary level of education and by the time they reach class 8, it is as high as 52.78 %.

The sociological barriers and psychological barriers for the girl child to be educated are many. Casteism, gender stereotyping, low economic status, domestic work and farm work in rural areas, inadequate facilities for drinking water and sanitation, fear of safety for the girl child when schools are located at a distance, mobility issues, low parental motivation seem to curtail girl child education at secondary level (Chandan Kumar Singh, 2015). Such long existing problems require different approaches to solve them. Retention and provision of higher education opportunities become a possibility to the girl child if educational institutions were to adopt certain practical measures.

### **Suggested Practical Measures**

#### **Inculcation of Gender Sensitization Topics in Syllabus**

Gender sensitization topics should be included in the syllabus right from primary level to secondary stages of education rather than at graduate or post graduate levels of education as is the current practice. Gender equality needs to be imbibed in the children of both sexes from early stages so that children grow up with the sense of equality. Children should be taught the importance of equal opportunities from the early stages so that they become a part of a society that is much more equal and evolved.

#### **Providing Nutrition**

An enabling environment for education requires that the hunger of the girl child should be assuaged before she intends to learn. Providing nutrition at secondary level can help girls to focus on education and enables them to participate in the activities at school level. The Women and Child Development Ministry prepared a draft National Policy for women empowerment with focus on education and nutrition.

### **Inclusion of Girl Child in Sports in All Levels of Education**

Implementation of compulsory sports for girl child from primary to higher levels of education for the purpose healthy physical development and mental/emotional development is another measure that could make a difference in girl child education.

### **Self- Defense as Part of Curriculum**

Helping the girl child learn self-defense from early stages as part of the curriculum would greatly help girls look after their safety. This would also help them to be self-reliant.

### **Successful Women as Role Models**

Involvement of successful women at schools as role models and mentors to inform children about careers and the difficulties that they had to overcome to be successful in life would be motivating to girls. Women from different fields can be asked to spend some time with the students to guide them, mentor them and inspire them which can immensely improve the morale of the girl child as well show them a path to success.

### **Providing Access to Education**

Providing access and financial recourse (affordability) become necessary in the initial stages of girl child education. Providing them free education based on need would greatly increase the enrolment of girls in higher education.

### **Career Counseling**

Career counseling is a much-neglected aspect in schools. Girls should be made aware of different paths that one can take than be bound by traditionally structured roles. They should be made aware of different professions that are possible to them and the ways and means to achieve to success career wise. They should be able to choose a career based on their interests, abilities and available opportunities. They should be made aware of the time required for making a career, the finances required, the scholarships that may exist and the ways to procure them. They should learn to achieve success in their selected professions.

### **STEM Education**

Encouraging girls from early stages for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine) course or allied vocational courses can be empowering to girls. The paucity of women in such courses can be demoralizing to society on the whole. For pursuing STEM courses, deserving and economically weaker girl students should be given special scholarships. It is only such measures that can bridge the gap. Delhi government has taken certain steps in this direction when they launched a mobile learning app called STEM for school going girls which provides access to technology. This encourages girls to learn science and technology and tries to lessen the rural gender disparity which is seen in STEM courses.

### **Access to Computers and Technology**

Girls need to be given computers so that they can access information. Providing cost friendly computers which can be used for information search and learning can help girls study better and have more access to knowledge. A girl child who is at the tether end of education due to sociological and cultural settings in her household can overcome these hurdles when she is able to access knowledge through computers providing technical gadgets and technological knowledge can promote

access to learning. Free distribution of digital gadgets and access to internet helps digital inclusivity of girls in education.

### **Making Parents Partners in Education**

For the educational development of girls, parents should be made partners and should be informed about the educational development and career choices that the girls can take and the avenues open to them by the selection of career choices.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Social mobility requires an initial nudge in the right direction so that they can be pulled out of inertia. The girl child education requires momentum and the National Policy of Education - 2020 does not outline specific practices which would help to galvanize girl child education. Covid- 19 has unequally impacted girls and their education, specifically in rural areas. For any changes in policies related to education, the existing policies and educational infrastructure need to be updated so that desirable changes may take place. For sustainable growth in girl child education, educational policies should incorporate practical steps so that the best ways to roll out future changes can be adopted at all levels of education. Girl child education is no exception to general education, but requires special emphasis at all policy levels to make up for the lack of equal educational opportunities for girls.

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