

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: A Pre-requisite to Learning and ECCE

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Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 has been well appreciated for its comprehensiveness and inclusivity. This policy is the first to advocate bringing preschool education into the main fold of the formal institutionally managed education system. Another important emphasis of this policy is on developing foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills in all children by class III. As part of the Shikshak Parv programme, the webinar on “Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: A Pre-requisite to Learning and ECCE” was organized on 9 September 2021.

Session Highlights

Sh. Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Additional Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy began the webinar by welcoming all the teachers, principals, students, academicians and parents viewing the live webcast. He invited Ms. Anita Karwal, Secretary School Education and Literacy and the chairperson of the webinar to share her introductory remarks. She stated that Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) has been given a lot of emphasis in NEP 2020. The pandemic situation has made it all the more problematic for first generation learners and children who have never been to school in the past year. She highlighted that all states have begun the process of allocating resources for NIPUN Bharat, so the discussion on its implementation gains significance. The need to continue education through various modes and forms is very essential, with classes I and II being the most challenging for teachers. She emphasized that since FLN will be spearheaded by teachers, they need to develop a mindset of recognizing the uniqueness of each child, and thus use unique interventions. She added that administrators, planners, and experts have developed NIPUN Bharat guidelines, which may be followed by States.

Ms. Karwal then introduced Shri Maneesh Garg, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education, and stated that he has worked extensively on school education related schemes of GoI, and is now

working as the National Mission Director for FLN. She invited Shri Garg to make a presentation on THE National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat, with an emphasis on FLN mission, system scope and possibilities.

Shri Maneesh Garg stressed on the importance of FLN in school education. He started his presentation with the current status of the Foundational Stage of school education. He quoted the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2017 conducted by NCERT which highlights poor attainment in early years, with around 13-18% students from class 3, 5 and 8 falling below basic learning levels. The major reason is that the desired learning outcomes are not adequately acquired in early grades. He stated that the vision of NIPUN Bharat is to create an enabling environment that leads to universalization of FLN in primary classes within 5 years so that every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy at the end of Class III. He informed the audience that the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education will be the implementing agency of the FLN Mission at the national level.

Sh. Garg shared the key components and the *Lakshyas* or Learning Goals of the mission. He said that the NEP had recommended a 3-month play-based School Preparatory Module (SPM). This resulted in the SPM titled *Vidya Pravesh*, developed by NCERT. The teacher's role in its implementation is crucial. This need is addressed through NISHTHA 3.0, for the Continuous Professional Development of teachers, which has recently been launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. He explained that a five-tier implementation mechanism for NIPUN Bharat will be set up at the National, State, District, Block and School level in all states and UTs. All stakeholders will have a specific role in the implementation of the mission targets. He added that measurable key performance indicators will be developed for monitoring of the mission.

Ms. Karwal concurred that teachers need to focus on reading first and foremost. She then called upon Prof. Sridhar Srivastava, In-charge Director, NCERT, to speak, adding that under his leadership several NEP-related initiatives have been undertaken by NCERT in the last one year.

Prof. Sridhar Srivastava, Director NCERT made a presentation on developmental goals and codification of Learning Outcomes (LOs). He started with the introduction to the foundational

stage of education as per NEP 2020, and its place in the FLN Mission, highlighting the importance and essentiality of *Vidya Pravesh* in the initial 3 months of Class I. He explained the three developmental goals of FLN i.e. children maintain good health and wellbeing; children become effective communicators and children become involved learners and connect with their immediate environment. He elaborated on the underlying competencies under each goal in detail, and explained the codification of the Learning Outcomes under each goal. He further informed that the key competencies and learning outcomes described in NIPUN Bharat Guidelines are derived from The Preschool Curriculum (2019) and the Learning Outcomes at the Elementary Stage developed in 2017. Further, he added that the competencies are age appropriate based on 21st century skills. The learning outcomes are progressive and are in continuum.

Ms. Karwal appreciated the presentation and called upon Prof. Suniti Sanwal, Head, DEE, NCERT to make her presentation. She highlighted that Prof. Sanwal has spent considerable time and energy in developing the competencies and goals for FLN, along with holding stakeholder consultations.

Prof. Sanwal began her presentation ‘Towards Equitable Learning Competency Based Education’ by saying that students, including first generation learners, come from various backgrounds, have varied attention spans and interests, and have different language abilities. Therefore, they have various levels of readiness when they enter school, and thus different learning needs, but we tend to treat them at par and provide the same kind of instruction and also use the same assessment criteria. While discussing about the FLN Framework in NIPUN Bharat Guidelines, she stated that the holistic development of children encompasses: good health and well-being, effective communication and connecting with the immediate environment. She explained how competency and learning outcomes have been used in the NIPUN Bharat Guidelines. She highlighted the difference between competency, which is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude, whereas learning outcomes that are measurable and observable statements which are evidence of having acquired the competencies. The ultimate goal of Competency-based Education (CBE) is to use the knowledge in real life situations and in new situations. The competencies are well-defined and fixed; they remain the same; but the Learning Outcomes vary and move in progression, while retaining their base in the previous level. She informed that the Learning Outcomes are thus progressive and spiral in nature.

Prof. Sanwal then discussed the major shifts to be made for moving towards CBE as per NEP 2020. These include: (a) classroom transactions will shift towards competency based learning using art integrated, sports integrated and story-telling based pedagogies, (b) less emphasis on input and greater emphasis on output potential, concerning desired learning outcomes, (c) formative and adaptive assessment “as” “of” and “for” learning will be aligned with the learning outcomes, capabilities and disposition for each subject in a given class, (d) examination to test achievement of learning outcomes through assessment of core concept of knowledge, relevant higher order skills, application of knowledge in real life situations and meeting the skill requirement of 21st century, and (e) focusing on the way forward for CBE. Prof. Sanwal said that curriculum, syllabus, and teaching material need to be presented in an integrated manner. Assessment should be based on achievement of LOs. Teaching will have to connect with real life and be aligned to the goals. She concluded that above all, well planned teacher training is required in order to adopt pedagogy for CBE.

Ms. Karwal thanked Prof. Sanwal for explaining that teaching can no longer be confined to the four walls of the classroom and that teaching will have to include a connect to the real life of the child. Teaching will have to be systematic as children have to achieve certain goals. Ms. Karwal invited Smt. A. Sridevasena, IAS, State Project Director, Telangana to make her presentation. She mentioned that Telangana has been doing substantial work in the area of interventions, particularly during the pandemic, including reaching the last child in the last mile and creation of content in regional languages.

Smt. Sridevasena mentioned that NEP 2020 has highlighted the importance of ensuring that all children acquire FLN skills. She also referred to National Achievement Survey 2017 which stated that poor learning attainment begins in early years and continues to exacerbate. She added that the Government of Telangana was among the earliest to recognize the importance of FLN and had constituted a steering committee in 2019 to help achieve it. Initiatives such as System Diagnostics, FLN and TSG cell, Learning Outcome Framework, Home Learning Programme were taken up. Based on the diagnostics, the State is planning to work on pedagogy and governance to achieve the FLN targets. She said that the State is focusing on responsibilities of stakeholders to achieve the goals, improvement of teaching-learning process and capacity

building of teachers. Further, the state is planning to pilot an innovative model in a few mandals. She informed that Telangana has developed a three months preparatory module, and an alternative calendar has been designed for classes 3-10. The infrastructure facilities will be strengthened.

Ms. Karwal thanked Smt. Sridevsena said that her presentation brought out the need for systemic diagnosis to be used for the purpose of effective planning and innovating solutions. She complimented the handbooks that have been designed for local functionaries. She then invited Dr. T.S. Joshi, Director, GCERT Gujarat to make his presentation. She stated that Dr. Joshi is responsible for the transformative reforms in Gujarat. GCERT was one of the first to start a daily and weekly calendar during the pandemic.

Dr. T.S. Joshi highlighted the importance of the eminent educationist Shri Gijubhai Badheeka's philosophy in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which is a pre-requisite to Foundational Literacy & Numeracy. *Daxinamurti Baalmandir*, a school founded by late Gijubhai Badheeka, has developed curriculum for 3-6 age group, which focuses on sensory development through activity, games, drawing, puppetry, play and skits, with a focus on personal and public hygiene, moral values, good behavior and discipline. He added that parental involvement is emphasized and the pedagogy is toy-based and activity-based. He also shared the activities being conducted at Daxinamurti Baalmandir related to all the three developmental goals.

Dr. Joshi then explained the program 'PRAGNA – Pravruttidvaragnan' organized for the implementation of FLN Mission, which makes use of activity-based pedagogy, scientific learning cycle, use of teaching learning materials such as Big book, Picture calendar, Activity cards, Workbook, Child tracking through the learning ladder and Student-Teacher Interaction. He touched upon a research study conducted in 2019-20 with 3000 children of Classes 3-5, on loud reading speed. In PRAGNA, a "Quarterly Diagnostic Assessment Test" which includes oral and activity-based test, is conducted every 3 months. He informed the audience that the state of Gujarat has formally launched the NIPUN Bharat Mission. Online orientation about the NIPUN Bharat Mission has been conducted with district level functionaries. NIPUN Bharat Guidelines have been translated into the local language. He added that a child tracking system has been established to track all students of age group 5 - 18 years. Further, e-content in local languages

has been included in DIKSHA portal. FLN YouTube Channel has been started for teachers, parents and community.

Ms. Karwal thanked Dr. Joshi for his presentation and recommended other states to look at the functioning and roles played by GSCERT and try to implement it in their respective contexts.

Question & Answer Session

Ms. Karwal directed selected questions received on the MyGov portal from the public to all the speakers. She asked Dr. Joshi how can we help first generation learners cope with FLN? Dr. Joshi responded that the teachers' responsibility increases in such a situation. The teacher should communicate more with the parents as to what a child has achieved. Parents, even if non-literate, need to be involved. He said that the challenge can be overcome with the community's help in the *Aanganwadi* and at the Block level.

Ms. Karwal then asked Prof. Suniti Sanwal that while we are preparing the content for FLN, how it can be correlated to the pandemic. Prof Sanwal responded that the content will be developed by the State as per the context and needs of that respective State. She clarified that FLN NISTHA will empower the teachers to create an enabling classroom environment which is responsive to the child's needs. Sh. Maneesh Garg added that the content can be illustrated with examples on the importance of hand washing and social distancing. Prof. Sanwal further said that kitchen is a rich resource for content. Ms. Karwal said that connecting boys and girls to the kitchen where their mothers toil can be a bonding and appreciation exercise, which would help the children, understand how much work goes in keeping the home vibrant.

Ms. Karwal asked Sh. Maneesh Garg what can be done more for building more items for assessment. He responded that assessment should be done in a way that assesses and also promotes learning. For this purpose, a large number of items can be developed by the teachers. He stated that capacity building through NISTHA is being done on how to conduct assessment. He added that the items developed by the teachers curated by DIETs and SCERTs for wider dissemination. Ms. Karwal informed the viewers that item banks developed by NCERT on the DIKSHA portal will be uploaded as well, which will be related to Learning Outcomes.

Ms. Karwal asked the Director, NCERT that what changes may be expected in teacher training to positively impact FLN. Director NCERT responded that translation of NIPUN Bharat Guidelines, as done by GCERT Gujarat, will positively impact FLN. Further, teachers will know that the NIPUN Bharat is built on earlier familiar processes. He mentioned that the anganwadi teachers should also know about FLN and assessment. Thus, FLN NISTHA is important in this aspect. Ms. Karwal added that teacher capacity building, which is the lynchpin, will have to take place at two levels. NISTHA modules developed at central level are standardized and must be followed. At the state level, from SCERT up to CRC, all levels need to be strengthened. Thus, it is up to the states to strengthen these institutions and bring in outside agencies to partner with them. She highlighted that for successful implementation of *Balvatika* we have to take the *Anganwadis* along or merged with primary schools.

Concluding Remarks

Ms. Karwal discussed the issues teachers face in FLN area. She remarked that it is a well-known fact that to achieve LOs at the foundational level, face to face teaching is the best format. During online teaching through devices, there will be a communication gap. She drew attention to the fact that children without devices may dropout and fall out of the system. It is in this context that tracking each child's enrolment and achievements, in government and private schools, under NIPUN Bharat, becomes crucial. Regarding school-based assessment, she emphasized that it is important to empower teachers to conduct criterion-referenced assessment related to LOs and goals. Continuous assessment at the foundational level requires observation and can only be done by schools and teachers. She concluded by saying that the goals, competencies and LOs that have been laid down at the central level are the standards that need to be followed by all schools.