Editorial

After the approval of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) on 29th July, 2020 by the Government of India, the first of the four National Curriculum Frameworks on the Foundational Stage was released on 20th October, 2022 at New Delhi. By all account, this stage, the foundational stage is indeed foundational in the life of a child as researches reveal that learning at this stage positively impacts learnings later in life. NEP (2020) recommends five years of an integrated Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children between ages 3 – 8in the 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical structure of school education. The policy envisages that by 2030 all the children will be school-ready from Grade 1 onwards. AnganvadiCentres/Pre-School/ Bal Vatikas in the country will help in achieving this important milestone. Classes 1 and 2 will form the last 2 years of the Foundational Stage. NEP 2020 recommends play-based, activity-based and inquiry-based curricula.

This NCF for Foundational Stage builds on the NEP2020. It defines aims, curricular goals, competencies and learning outcomes at this stage. It also discusses approaches for learning language and numeracy. It recommends pedagogy to be adopted in classrooms, assessment plans to be used in order to achieve learning objectives and overall strategies to be followed to link up with the preparatory stage to strengthen the learning foundations of our young learners. The document ends with a few illustrative examples and researches from the country and world on ECCE.

In so far using technology at the foundational stage is concerned, this NCF says

i.   "Enabling access to a diverse range of content and materials that is contextual for the child, age-appropriate and in a range of languages and materials." So, it says that all types of eContent (packaged in traditional media such as text, images, audio, video or new media such as interactive content and immersive content) in children's own languages can be made available to them.

ii. "Enabling access to content in diverse forms, spaces, and formats to ensure equitable access and to ensure inclusion of Divyang children." All existing technologies and platforms such as radio, TV, internet, computers, tablets, etc. may be used to reach out to children.

iii. "Ensuring that the key focus of the material would be to create an enjoyable experience for the learner and feed the child's innate curiosity and agency."

iv. "Supporting the capability development of Teachers, parents and the community."

It is important to note here that at this stage, NCF recommends providing a diverse range of engaging content across different platforms to the learners. Capacity building is restricted to teachers, parents and members of the community. It shows concerns about children spending time in using digital technology and its effect on their physical and mental well-being. However, it does not shy away from suggesting controlled and moderate use of digital technology by children. Perhaps to make them aware of the technology itself. It recommends digital infotainment for children. Further, the NCF for Foundational Stage recommends embedding the textbooks developed at this stage with appropriate audio/video/immersive eContent. The NCF at this stage lays emphasis on the digital rights of children and invokes the guidelines suggested by the UN Commission on the Rights of the

Child, which states that such a digital right is "non-discriminatory", gives primacy to "children's development", serves the "best interests of the child and respect children's views."

Recently, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 was released by Pratham Education Foundation. It throws some interesting insights into the state of education in the country, especially about the foundational stage. There has been a substantial increase in the enrollment rates of young children (ages 3-5 years) in some sort of ECCE centres including the Anganwadi centres. The increase is even more for children of age 4 or 5. Despite pandemic-induced closures of schools, the enrollment rate for the age group (6-14) has also increased marginally. Government schools too saw a rise in the enrollment rate in this age group. An encouraging sign is a decline in the proportion of girls (age 11-14) who are not currently enrolled. The decrease in the proportion of girls not enrolled in school is even sharper among older girls in the 15-16 age group, ASER, 2022 reports. Along with these encouraging signs in enrollment, the report also flags a few serious concerns such as the drop in the basic reading ability of children (true for both boys and girls and students of both government schools and private schools) to pre-2012 levels. Children's basic arithmetic levels have also declined to pre-2018 levels.

So, efforts to increase access to educational opportunities for all sections of students have yielded positive results; it's the quality of education that remains the central concern. Can technology be of any help in overcoming this crisis, this is a moot question.

This issue consists of twenty one manuscripts: seventeen research articles, one review article, two general articles and one book review. These articles are related to concepts like, online education, Augmented Reality, happiness curriculum and online learning, use of mobile games in education, cyber safety and security and multimedia learning. I thank all the authors and reviewers for contributing in taking out this issue of the journal. I hope the manuscripts will contribute in yet another episode of academic discourse.

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Editor