

New Education Policy as a Pathway of Educational Reform in New India "Education is Salvation"

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Abstract

The New Education Policy aims to create the way for transformational reforms in schools and higher education systems in the country. This policy will replace the 34-year-old National Policy on Education-1986. NEP aims to introduce the Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability up to the 2030. Vision for Sustainable Development and quicktransformation of India into a vibrant knowledge society and global Gyan hub by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century needs. It aims at bringing out the diverse capabilities of students. Government of India announced its New Education Policy which is based on the recommendations of an expert committee headed by Dr. Kasturirangan, Former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). This paper points out on various educational policies announced in education system and compare them with the currently adopted system. Various innovations and predicted implications of NEP 2020 on the Indian education system along with its merits are discussed. Few of them are, revise the education system, create world class institutions across the country, increase Gross Enrolment Ratio to at least 50% by 2035.

Key words - Vision, Reform, Sustainable, Outcome, Analytical.

Introduction

A national policy on education lays down the Central Government's vision for education and human resource development in the country. The first such policy was released in 1968. It stated that "the primary purpose of education is to provide students with the widest opportunity to develop their potentialities to the full.

The Second Education Policy was introduced in the year 1986 after 18 years of first one. Its emphasis was on "the elimination of disparities in the educational system and on improvement in the quality of government funded schools so that, ordinarily, parents may not feel the need to send their children in private high fee-charging institutions."

The Third National Education Policy has introduced after the second one i.e. in the year 2020 with a more specific mission. New Education Policy is based on the principle that education must develop not only the cognitive capacities but the 'foundation capacity' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacity such as systematic thinking, problem-solving, social, ethical, and emotional capacities and disposition."

The National Education Policy 2020 has been approved by The Union Cabinet under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Making way for large scale transformational reforms in both school and higher education sectors. Having the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Liability, NEP is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suited to 21st century.

The NEP's main purpose is to reform the education system and bridge the gap between current learning outcomes and those desired. Recognizing the need to keep up with a rapidly changing world and knowledge landscape, the NEP 2020 articulates that purpose of the education system is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. Its vision is to develop the productive, and enthusiastic citizens for building an equitable, inclusive and plural society as envisaged by our constitution.

Such strong emphasis on equity and quality is laudable, as is the effort to broaden the scope of "quality education." The policy proposes a move away from content-heavy curricula in order "to make space for analytical thinking, more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based and analysis-based learning." Giving equal importance to co-curricular activities (i.e., arts, sports, vocational skills), it mandates a shift toward multidisciplinary education, away from "arts, science, and commerce" streams, with renewed focus on 21st century skills. It is a welcome breath of fresh air, given that the current system is strongly driven by rote learning and content-based examinations, divorced from any real application to life.

Challenges in New Education Policy

The New National Education Policy was announced right in the middle of the pandemic in July and draws from the common boundary of making India's education system future ready. The NEP 2020 focuses on bringing the much-needed transformational changes in the Indian education system with a global perspective.

With the NEP, early childhood education has been brought in the realms of mainstream education for the first time. Skill-based learning is being prioritised with greater use and implementation of modern technologies. A multi-disciplinary, value-based approach to education focussing on holistic development along with life-skills training has been suggested in the policy to improve employability of students in country. Though the NEP 2020 is path-breaking, the lack of a clear roadmap for implementation of the proposals in it is delaying the much-needed education sector reforms, which is crucial for sustaining India's future growth.

Long awaited removal of lockdown enforcing since March' 20 is being released in a phased manner and students are coming back to their classrooms, immediate and coordinated implementation of NEP reforms across all states needs to be prioritised. There are certain challenges that the government must address to expedite the implementation process.

The NEP-2020 foresees increasing the education expenditure from 4.6% to 6% of total national GDP. Considering the pronounced move towards digitisation and e-learning in the Post Covid years, a higher spend would be needed for establishing the required technology and digital infrastructure. Developed countries allocate up to 20 per cent of their GDP on education, and India would also need to ramp up its spend in order to succeed in its quest of bringing the education sector at par with global standards. More data for comparison with developed and other countries.

Given the current situation of the economy, getting private sector funding to meet the developmental goals is a credible solution. The government should start evaluating Public-Private -Partnership PPP models without further delay for getting the private sector to contribute, collaborate, and collectively utilise their expertise for expediting the transformation of education in India.

At present, India's higher education enrolment, calculated in terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is only 26%. GER is the ratio of population in the 18-23 age group to the number of people enrolled in higher education. Achieving the goal of doubling GER by 2035 will require far higher and faster investment in ramping up the higher education infrastructure.

Building new infrastructure would be a herculean task requiring massive investments and much longer time to implement. Hence, to meet the challenge of under-supply of quality higher education institutions in India, instead of building new infrastructure the existing government structures could be repurposed and rebuilt into modern higher education facilities. Such conversions could be fast-tracked through model which could be similar to the built-operate-transfer infrastructure projects.

Resources should be, instead of using digital and technological infrastructure of higher education institutes, so that they can extend equitable education opportunities to every student in the country through their ed-tech platforms. More importantly, the collaboration between government, higher education institutions, service providers, Ed-tech companies and public and private enablers is the urgent need of the hour for creating the requisite education infrastructure in urban and rural areas.

Emphasis on Advancement Teaching Methods

With the transformation of school and college infrastructure, teachers also need to be updated in modern teaching pedagogies and methodologies. Hence, while ramping up infrastructure of schools and colleges, improving quality of teachers must also go hand-in-hand to prepare a ready and vast pool of trained teachers for the 21st century.

The Government will need to come up with fixed investment plans, including in the Union Budget and also collaborate with the private sector to ensure continuous skill enhancement and training of teachers and bring them at par with global standards.

Since remote learning and technology-backed education delivery expected to become the New Normal in post-Covid world, huge investments will be needed for developing digital infrastructure such as digital classrooms, remote expertise-driven teaching models, AR/VR tools to bridge gaps in physical teaching and creating laboratory infrastructure.

The availability of the requisite hardware- software, network equipment, connectivity, and 24X7 reliable information are the keys to bridging the digital divide in education. Like the government is opening up the private investments in infrastructure sector such as power, telecom and transport, digital infrastructure development in higher education institutes and schools also needs to be fast tracked.

Considering the longevity of the pandemic, content is being up-scaled to include a combination of augmented and virtual reality for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Growing demand for online education is fuelling sales of Ed-Tech products. Ed-tech providers are preparing e-learning and curated content plans and are also involved in localization of the content to cater to the needs of various ages, regions, and culture.

Technology-Based Education

In NEP-20, technology-based education will be offered to the students. We live in a tech-driven society. Most of the decisions, we make, are influenced by technology. With the NEP-20's motive to enlarge tech-based education, the national curriculum can offer top notch learning to its students. With the help of this new education system, the students will be going global as this NEP-20 offers a chance to the top 100 International Universities to open their branches in India.

The new school assessment scheme will come in place from 2022-23. As per the new assessment scheme, school exams in grades 3, 5, and 8 will test the child's basic learning with a 360-degree progress report card. The policy has emphasized mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction at least till grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond. Sanskrit to be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an option for students, including in the three-language formula. Other classical languages and literature of India also to be available as options. No language will be imposed on any student. Students to participate in a fun project/activity on 'The Languages of India', sometime in Grades 6-8, such as, under the 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative. Several foreign languages will also be offered at the secondary level. Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country and National and State curriculum materials developed, for use by students with hearing impairment.

Education with Digital Capabilities:

The NEP-20 aims at promoting online education consequent to the recent rise in epidemics and pandemics to ensure preparedness with alternative modes of quality education whenever and wherever traditional and in-person modes of education are not possible, has been covered. A dedicated unit to score the building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building will be created in the MHRD to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education.

Major Vision of New Education Policy

Primary Level

New Policy objective for universalization of education from pre-school to secondary level with 100 % Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030. NEP-20 will bring 2 crores out of school children back into the mainstream through the open schooling system.

The current 10+2 system to be replaced by a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively. This will bring the hitherto uncovered age group of 3-6 years under the school curriculum, which has been recognized globally as the crucial stage for the development of mental faculties of a child. The new system will have 12 years of schooling with three years of Anganwadi/ pre-schooling.

Emphasis on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, no rigid separation between academic streams, extracurricular, vocational streams in schools; Vocational Education to start from Class 6 with Internships Teaching up to at least Grade 5 to be in mother tongue/ regional language. No language will be imposed on any student. Assessment reforms with 360-degree Holistic Progress Card, tracking student progress for achieving learning outcomes.

Higher Level

Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education to be raised to 50% by 2035; 3.5 crore seats to be added in higher education. The policy envisages broad-based, multi-disciplinary, holistic UG education with flexible curricula, creative combinations of subjects, integration of vocational education, and multiple entries and exit points with appropriate certification. UG education can be of 3 or 4 years with multiple exit options and appropriate certification within this period.

Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs), at par with IITs, IIMs, to be set up as models of best multidisciplinary education of global standards in the country. The National Research Foundation will be created as an apex body for fostering a strong research culture and building research capacity across higher education. Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be set up as a single overarching umbrella body for entire higher education, excluding medical and legal education. HECI to have four independent verticals – National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for standard-setting, Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding, and National Accreditation Assessment Council (NAAC) for accreditation. Public and private higher education institutions will be governed by the same set of norms for regulation, accreditation, and academic standards.

Affiliation of colleges is to be phased out in 15 years and a stage-wise mechanism is to be established for granting graded autonomy to colleges. Over some time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous Degree-granting college or a constituent college of a university. National Educational Technology Forum (an autonomous body) will be created to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas and the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration. NEP-20 emphasizes setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund, Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups. The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.

Conclusion

“The transformation of education will modify the psyche of the coming generation as we will have an educated population armed with innovative thinking, aware of the skills needed in the local market, research-oriented with an ability to give potential output,” says Hazarika. Emphasising on equity and inclusivity, the real outcome of the NEP-20 would be realised when the children in poor and rural areas get access to education. Hazarika is hopeful in the coming decade more students from underrepresented sections, minority community will find way to education institutes. Academics have hailed the policy as an important step to transform India into a knowledge hub. “Besides incorporating the ethos of Indian philosophy, it has also incorporated sustainable development goals in the curriculum at the undergraduate level. Inclusive education right from foundation till the student reaches a professional level will help in longer” says TG Sitaram, Director, IIT Guwahati. With most sectors moving to the digital platform, India needs to create an army of tech-enabled youngsters willing to take calculated risks. “Emphasis on analytical thinking, creativity and stronger conceptual understanding will encourage students to become self-motivated learners.

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