

Draft National Education Policy 2016- Will it help in achieving education outcomes?

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ABSTRACT – One of the milestone policies of Indian government is the National Education Policy. With the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1976, education was moved from the State to the Concurrent List, or the 86th Amendment in 2002 under which education became an enforceable right. There after several initiatives were taken up by different governments to improve the quality of our educational institutions. So far, India has published two policies, one in 1968 and the other in 1986 which was revised in 1992. National education policy, 2016, has come a long way in addressing the challenges of our education provision and suggest reforms that may alleviate several of them. National Policy of Education, 2016 has been formulated keeping in view the global commitment which seeks to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. The EFA agenda initiated in 2000 had several unfinished agenda particularly those relating to youth and adult illiterates, out-of-school children, low access to Early Childhood Care and Education, inadequate opportunities for skill development and unsatisfactory quality of education and student learning levels. The NEP will, therefore, pursue both the unfinished EFA agenda and the targets associated with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 in relation to India.

Key words: National Education Policy; Education Objectives; National Planning

I. Introduction

The key challenges that affected the education scenario of the country and led to a shameful performance at international benchmarking tests such as TIMMS and PRILS are deliberated well in the policy. The policy framework succinctly reflects the vision statement, in the main thrust areas, that have been chosen to change the education landscape of the country.

II. NEP

A. Vision

The Vision of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2016, envisions a credible and high-performing education system capable of ensuring inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and producing students/graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country's development process, respond to the requirements of the fast-changing, ever-globalizing knowledge-based economy and society.

The primary focus of the framework is on the quality of education as the country has already worked on the issues of access and inclusion.

Improvements and recommendations have touched several areas of education domains, which if worked upon earnestly will improve the quality dispensed in our schools. The policy is holistic, affecting all levels of education ladder, right from preprimary to university education to research and development. Almost all the recommendations suggested in the policy have been arrived at after extensive research on challenges that led to poor outcomes and inferior performance of institutions.

The most important deliberations that will impact education scenario are the following-

The state governments will strengthen the Anganwadi education by developing a structured curriculum and training to Anganwadi workers. Later Preschool education will be integrated into Primary school for which Anganwadi's will be set either in the school premises or close to them. Appropriate regulatory and monitoring rules and mechanisms will be designed for private pre-schools. This should streamline the preprimary education in our country and pave way for equity. Solid foundation in formative years of schooling leads to good learning and development of skills. Systematization of preprimary education in the country would arrest the flourishing of commercial preschool centers that are a cause of worry to the parents as well as the educationists.

1. Child Rights

Child Rights will find a special place in the policy which includes the personal and emotional safety of the children. The policy advocates zero tolerance approach for any breach of child rights. Stringent rules will be formulated as eligibility criteria for the recognition and registration of education institutions. Knowledge trainings would be imparted to all stakeholders on Child Protection Policy and Child Rights. Integration of Adolescent Education Programme and National Population Education Programme will be done in a phased manner. Schools will engage trained counsellors to confidentially advise parents and teachers on adolescence problems faced by growing boys and girls.

2. Alternate Schools

'Alternate schools' are a viable option of educational interventions for the special categories of very deprived and migrating children, and those living in difficult circumstances. Government sanction of these institutions will play a significant role in uplifting the status of these deprived communities and enable their young generation to access mainstream education after attaining the basic education qualification. The adaptation of education programs is necessary to reach the inaccessible pockets of human civilization, addressing this issue is paramount to confront the unevenness in the living standards of the masses.

3. No detention policy

Amendment of this policy is a pre-requisite to right the wrongs of our system. This policy has seriously affected the academic performance of students and was conveniently used by schools and principals in promoting students to higher grades without acquiring basic knowledge and skills of an appropriate class or age level. Consequently, high proportion of students without age appropriate curriculum standards were promoted by the schools, cognitive bleed of a young generation without any skills of LIFE, who has to lead the country in near future was one of the gravest consequences of this lopsided policy.

Education outcomes cannot be compromised for any reason. No rationale will be a justifiable ground for non-detention policy. The current policy is proposing a no detention policy up to class V, again an error which may take years to correct. There is enough scientific evidence to show that maximum learning happens during the primary school stage, if this stage is compromised, it may prove detrimental to the nation as well as the communities. Therefore, no detention policy as an essential element of any framework deters stakeholders of reliable performance. Instead, to mitigate the issue of poor learning outcomes, strategies that help in developing the learning abilities and learning skills of students should be

improved along with the teaching learning processes and systems.

B. Curriculum Renewal and Examination Reforms

Curricular reforms are proposed to meet the emerging aspirations and align to national goals of social cohesion, religious amity and national integration. Curriculum renewal at all levels of education is the need of the hour. The policy envisages preparing learners to respond to the impact of globalization and the demands of emerging knowledge based economy and society by linking education with life-skills and the world of work. There is a mention of clear standards of educational performance and learning outcomes for attaining objectives.

Standards are important to ensure better accountability, to hold teachers and schools responsible for what goes on in the classrooms. When learning is aligned to standards higher level of learning is possible.

Standards based instruction helps guide the planning, implementation, and assessment of student learning. The use of standards streamlines all educational processes and ensures uniformity across the length and breadth of the country. Standards based instructions ensures that the academic, personal and social needs of students are met. It helps in following robust assessment practices, again an area of controversy of Indian education pattern, to track students' performance.

States and schools have a chaotic perception of CCE which can be dispelled by the implementation of standards based instruction and assessment. It allows for defining learning outcomes related to scholastic and co-scholastic domains.

Life skills education in a technology driven environment is essential to main the equilibrium. Curriculum therefore, will impart an understanding of both fundamental duties and rights so learners become responsible citizens both within the country and in the world. There is a recommendation to cover the issues of social justice and legal measures in order to avoid social discrimination. An inter disciplinary curriculum promoting citizenship education, peace education, character building, legal and constitutional literacy, financial literacy, environmental sustainability etc. will help the future citizens of the country in addressing the issues of female feticides, rapes and atrocities against women and economically and socially backward communities. In addition, Pre-vocational oriented activities will be a crucial element in the curriculum from preliminary stages to develop positive attitude towards dignity of labor and develop employability skills, providing opportunities of decent and dignified life for youth.

C. Inclusive Education and Student Support

Again, this sector needs immediate attention and reform. Unless, quality and equity in access is ensured, India cannot rid itself of various maladies affecting the socially and the economically backward population.

Gaps in present education system have failed to create a heterogeneous environment for inclusive education to cater to the educational needs of children with special needs.

Access alone will not guarantee quality learning and opportunities of further development for this section of the society. Several challenges such as low literacy rates, high drop outs, poor enrollment failed to restore the benefits of central government schemes among the tribal and the backward communities. Such difficulties should be tackled through multi-pronged approaches. Mere planning and implementation will not raise the social and economic bar of these communities. Unless the community is educated, equal opportunities of social and economic provision may not be available to this cadre. This great divide can be reduced only by ensuring that all sections of the population, irrespective of caste, creed and race, are guaranteed the fundamental right to education.

Tough measures of implementation and a robust system of monitoring alone will enable the achievement of policy targets. Extra remedial coaching or advisory facility may alleviate the concern to some extent but it will not help the students in attaining the curriculum standards. Instead, teachers recruited with latest pay commission package and later assessed by performance management system may help in bridging the learning gaps among students of different communities.

Although use of ICT in education is mooted as a main thrust area, it is difficult to comment at this juncture on the impact it will have on outcomes. Technology undoubtedly has to be the main teaching learning aid to satisfy the educational need of the 21st century learners, feasibility and the availability of infrastructure to make this possible need rigorous planning and unparalleled commitment on the part of implementation agencies.

D. Teacher Development and Management

Apart from incompetence in teaching, shortage of teachers at various levels of school education has affected the quality of education seriously in our country. Filling in the posts by recruiting contract and part time teachers must have left some surplus but the negative impact it had on students / citizens graduating out of schools cannot be analyzed.

The policy is hoping to address the challenges of problems of untrained teachers, lack of professionalism in teacher training institutions, teacher absenteeism and teacher accountability through a transparent and merit based teacher recruitment process. Independent Teacher Recruitment Commissions will be set up by the state governments to facilitate transparent, merit based selection and recruitment of teachers, principals and other academic cadres.

All vacancies in teacher education institutions and all positions of head teachers and principals will be filled up. Leadership training for head teachers and principals will be compulsory. Teaching and learning cannot happen in the absence of teachers; the departments should take cognizance of the fact that unless good teachers are deployed, learning cannot be enhanced. School leaders and teachers who function routinely without any continuous professional development programmes cannot inspire young minds. It is imperative for the school staff to update themselves on policies and trends to give the best to students.

Transparency will be maintained in the recruitment process, vacancies and transfers will be displayed for fair and equitable deployment. Local talent will be scouted to fill in positions in remote and difficult areas. Contractual teachers will be phased out gradually by absorbing the eligible teachers against sanctioned positions.

SMCs will become powerful with disciplinary powers in primary schools. Similarly, head teachers will play a significant role in upper primary and secondary schools to deal with absenteeism and indiscipline. Although government mandated SMCs were set up, they were not institutionalized successfully. The policy aims to reform and strengthen the SMCs to ensure teacher accountability. Teacher preparatory courses and teacher education colleges will be under scrutiny and reviewed for changes in duration, pattern, structure, curricula and delivery to overcome their existing limitations.

At the National level, a Teacher Education University will be set up impart teacher education courses and faculty development. All teacher education institutions, such as, DIETs, B.Ed. Colleges, etc. will be accredited. Curriculum of teacher development programmes will cover aspects of co-scholastics, especially life skills, ethical education, physical education and arts and crafts to ensure opportunities are available to all children to study an interesting subject that satiates their creative need.

The drastic recommendation is the periodic assessment of teachers in government and private schools that will be linked to their future promotions and release of increments. Taking and clearing an assessment test every five years which

assesses their pedagogic skills and subject knowledge will go a long way in enabling teachers with sound subject and pedagogy skills are grooming the future citizens of a dynamic society.

E. School Assessment and Governance

This could be one of the trend setting components in ensuring quality provision reaching every student in every Indian school. Policy anticipates, better governance structures in schools might enable better management practices and use of data to monitor and support school performance.

Schools Quality Assessment and Accreditation could not take off successfully by CBSE board due to several reasons. The policy is toying with the idea of relaunching this mandate which will change the eco system and culture in every school. When schools are evaluated, graded, ranked and posted in public domain, there is every possibility that many aspects of school's functioning will undergo a dramatic change which will yield positive results. In addition, school boards of all states will be assessed and evaluated based on standards and different parameters. This step will ensure uniformity across boards and education pattern in the country making options easily accessible to students everywhere in the country.

Local governance will play a prominent role in preparing institutional plans and allocating adequately for school development. School community partnership can groom citizens with profound characters. In addition, Principals/head teachers will be held accountable for the academic performance of the schools and its improvement so a minimum tenure will be fixed for them.

F. Regulation in Higher Education

Revamping Higher Education is the need of the hour as several major institutions were established long back, with changed times, they need to get acclimatized with the modern thoughts and philosophy. It is necessary to bring about a healthy balance between autonomy and accountability. Setting up a Central Educational Statistics Agency (CESA) as agency for central data collection, compilation and consolidation agency with high quality statistical expertise and management information will enable predictive analysis, manpower planning and future course corrections. Periodic monitoring of universities and colleges is important in improving the quality of higher education in our country. Modernization of higher education is required to provide graduates with prominent level employable skills as well as transferable skills that equip them for a fast-changing job market. In addition, it accelerates the mobility of graduates in finding careers outside India.

Transparency in every higher education institution will be ensured through a website for disclosing standard information of admissions, fees, faculty, programmes, examination results, placements, governance, finance, business tie-ups, management and a report on academic and co-scholastic activities as well as all other information relating to the institution.

I. Quality Assurance

In Higher Education will be made mandatory, all higher education institutions will be accredited either by NAAC or NBA. The policy will ensure that an expert committee that is aware of international accreditation practices will restructure NAAC and NAB methodology, parameters and criteria and create a dedicated website, to enable students and other stakeholders to make informed choices.

G. Open and Distance Learning & MOOCs

Another major area of revamp is Open and Distance Learning (ODL) for achieving enhanced access, developing skills, capacity building, training, employability and life-long learning.

An estimated 4 million students are enrolled under ODL. Open and distance learning in the country is provided mainly by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and State Open Universities in the higher education space and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the main provider in the field of school education. These are essential education outlets for the students who cannot pursue higher education due to several reasons but are keen on enhancing their academic credentials.

The New Education Policy 2016 envisages Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to provide free access to cutting edge courses at relatively much lower cost. The demand for MOOCs is likely to rise in future with growing aspirations and need for continuous upgrading of knowledge. MHRD has planned to launch Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), a web portal where Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on various subjects will be available. Promotion, coordination, regulation and maintenance of MOOCs will be the priority of an autonomous body which will also develop a mechanism for recognition, transfer and accumulation of credits. A quality assurance mechanism for accreditation will ensure standards are attained and maintained.

Another major step will be the Collaboration of Open Schooling (NIOS) with Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship to address the demand for vocational education. This stride would serve as a catalyst in addressing and ameliorating the issues of inequity in career aspirations

and career choices for millions of socially and economically vulnerable student population.

For the benefit of students who are graduating as “global citizens” internationalization of Education would provide an added dimension of generation and application of new knowledge and skills. Massive positive changes are the expectations of this venture which will enable the capacity building of students and faculty, knowledge transfer across borders, generation of new academic environments, virtual mobility and digital learning. Apart from importing foreign education, Indian education system, processes and culture will be exported to foreign shores.

H. Decentralized approach for achieving education targets

Apart from strengthening the existing initiatives, involvement of Self Help Groups, NGOs, Government, schools/ colleges/ educational institutions, youth and women’s organizations will be sought for achieving universal youth and adult literacy. In the contemporary world, lifelong education is regarded as the determinant of a literate society.

Although the National Literacy Mission Authority at the apex level, the State Literacy Mission Authorities at the State level and the Lok-Shiksha-Samitis at the District, Block and the Gram Panchayat, as well as the resource support bodies were constituted to monitor the planning and implementation of adult literacy targets at distinct levels, they can be achieved only after a remodeling of the above agencies which have to visualize the big picture of creating a literate India.

I. Research, Innovation and New Knowledge

India’s quality of research is still mediocre and has not made a significant mark in the world. The research establishments do not provide an encouraging environment to the brilliant folk of the country who are interested in research and development due to which they look for opportunities elsewhere. While the country is emerging as a contender for super power status, there is every need to promote generation of new domains of learning required for a knowledge society. The new policy has rightly allocated adequate space and funds for developing this domain that will transform the field of research in the country, it may also motivate hundreds of youngsters in taking up research as a career instead of opting for the routine qualifications of engineering and medicine.

A proposal of setting up at least 100 new centers/departments of excellence, in the field of higher education, both in the public and the private sector is in the offing to promote excellence in research and encourage innovations. Private trusts, philanthropists and foundations will be given freedom to establish such Centers of Excellence. International

collaborations and networks will be promoted for developing human resources required to sustain new knowledge with special focus on inter-disciplinary research and studies.

J. Skills in Education and Employability

India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 54 percent of its total population below 25 years of age. It is estimated that there will be 104.62 million fresh entrants to the workforce by 2022 who will need to be skilled. However, institutional arrangements to support technical and vocational education programmes remain quite inadequate.

“Make in India” a distant dream still, will be possible only when academic and vocational education gain equivalent status and education allows horizontal and vertical mobility of young citizens who step out in the outside world to make a living.

Skill development is paramount not only in enhancing the skills of employability of the youth but also in creating a mindset of appreciating the dignity of labor. Youth, when not engaged in revenue generating activities will take up nefarious and destabilizing paths ruining their lives and the peace of nation. The focus of education on skills development will restore the hope and faith of youth in the system that is capable of providing them with a decent and dignified profession. In addition, it encourages the young entrepreneurs in dreaming big which will contribute to an economically strong India. As envisaged in the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy 2015 skill development programmes will be integrated in 25% of schools and higher education institutes.

III. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The National Education Policy, 2016, in a continuum to the earlier education policies of 1968, 1986/92 sets out new directions and tough stand on many components that remained status quo due to weak monitoring and implementation.

Education landscape of the country cannot be transformed until and unless the Centre and States worked together towards achieving common goal.

Apportioning specific roles and responsibilities to every education stakeholder will ensure the success of policy. Maximum usage of government machinery in making the masses knowledgeable about the policy is the first step towards realizing it. A shameful fact is that hundreds of schools and thousands of principals and teachers are blissfully unaware of the National Curriculum Framework and the

education policies. Education standards in our country can improve only when the policy is disseminated and implemented in toto.

While the central policy remains unaltered, leverage will be given to state governments in developing their own systems, procedures and administrative processes in implementing the policy. Clear performance indicators, targets and desired qualitative outcomes will make the implementation and monitoring easy and specific. Micro plans will aid in the percolation of policy ideas to the grass root level of schools and panchayats. A road map by every department with clear time lines is necessary to accomplish the goals of the education policy.

Smooth execution of the recommendations will be possible only when adequate budget allocations are made to all states. As stated earlier, where the policy suggests cross-department links to achieve targets; clear plans of implementation have to be formulated. Procedures of periodic assessment will evaluate the results of the policy and aids corrective measures to accomplish desirable results.

India is a vast country with teeming population. The effective implementation of the policy depends on the will of the people, schools and communities. Their knowledge, participation and inclination to change are paramount to the success of the new policy. Therefore, a robust mechanism of dissemination, execution and monitoring will enable us to measure how far the policy was successful in impacting the quality of provision and grooming our children with skills required for the life of a global citizen.

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