



Editors Pick > National Education Policy 2020 to revolutionise the education system

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The vision and the changes envisioned in the policy looks promising and an overhauls in the education system is much needed to align with the real world challenges and opportunities, writes Monica Malhotra Kandhari

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The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 comes a good 34 years after the last National Policy on Education (NPE) which was formulated in 1986. The new policy looks to undertake revisions and revamp the education system including education regulation in the country to put in place a system that is in-tune with the national developmental imperatives and aspirational goals in the 21st century. The vision and the changes envisioned in the policy looks promising and an overhauls in the education system is much needed to align with the real world challenges and opportunities. However, as with any policy, a lot depends on its implementation and the government must continue to engage with various stakeholders in the implementation stage as well.

As NEP 2020 underlines the aim to make India a Knowledge Hub for the world; this needs a lot of work on the ground with various stake holders. In line with this though, the NEP 2020 focuses on the core competencies and critical thinking skills rather than rote learning along with laying focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy skills. Also, keeping the medium of instruction in regional language/mother tongue will make it easier for the students to understand the concepts better. It should be noted that this concept has been around for with the earlier policies as well and has been the case for most state boards run schools.

Further, it is worth mentioning that vocational education was a part of the NEP 1986 as well however, introducing vocational education from Grade 6th onwards will give this a renewed push and will prepare the future workforce. However, it is important to note that this will need two things, i.e., Infrastructure and Trained staff to teach students, government needs to invest heavily for the same. All these thoughts will be fruitful only if these are implemented effectively at the ground level and the students are able to master the chosen skill such that the individual is employable as per the changing time. Likewise, Introduction of coding in middle school will definitely make the future citizens of the country think more logically and make them ready for the new job environment. This too will need trained teachers on the ground level to make this a reality, different stakeholders can work alongside government bodies and bring in their expertise be it in training teachers or students to expedite the process.

Additionally, the creation of NETF (National Educational Technology Forum) for free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration; and National Assessment Centre – PARAKH that been created to assess the students are welcome steps to start the process.

The fact that the new NEP still has to look at the basics and set all too known objective points to the need for a rethink on the role of private players in education. It may be pointed out that the enrolment in government schools fell by from 70.8% in 1993 to 52.5% in 2017, there has been a sharp rise in enrolment in private schools regardless of the income status of parents according to a recent Private School Sector Report. It is estimated that private schools account for about 47% of education in the country[1]. With almost half of the educational needs already catered to by private players and the impending need for additional trained teachers and investment in education infrastructure, the government need to lay emphasis on this once the NEP reached implementation stage. As in the earlier policies (NEP 1968 and 1986), teacher training should remain a key focus area both for teachers in the government as well as private schools.

Choice of teaching paraphernalia such as e-content, textbooks should be focussed on learning outcomes rather than tools of teaching and should be left to the better judgement of teachers and schools who know what works best for their students. State should play the role of a governing/monitoring body under whose aegis all teaching learning takes place – much like a referee in a game of soccer—within the parameters of relevant policies. If the schools are allowed to run as a for-profit organisation this sector can see large investments coming in from renowned private players thus creating more competition. Creating healthy competition among schools will help parents choose the right school for their students and this will also keep the fees of the private schools under check and the schools will be forced to provide better facilities and services. At times there are fallouts of privatisation, so to ensure proper checks and balances, the government may create guidelines depending on the kind of facilities and infrastructure available; the schools may be categorised based on the city, location, facilities, etc.

More importantly, the government should create a mechanism to assess the performance of all schools (including those run by government; by private players; and those on PPP model) based on the achievement of Learning Outcomes. A school rating system should also be created so that healthy completion can be created between the schools to make the teaching and learning process effective for students in an experiential way. All this should be done by an independent government aided/runagency, which can provide unbiased ratings. This can go a long way in achieving the objectives of the NEP at the school level along with aggressive participation of each stakeholder.

(The author is MD, MBD group)

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