



A STUDY CHALLENGING THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020 IN MODERN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

It has been known since times immemorial that social can be ushered in through education alone. As such, a futuristic education policy both at school and university levels is extremely essential. Nations around the world have been framing effective education policies juxtaposing traditional values and modern scientific culture and making necessary and timely adaptations to make these adaptable to the present-day needs. The Government of India had announced the new education policy based upon the recommendations of an expert committee headed by Dr. Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan, Former Chairman of ISRO. This policy tries to overrule its predecessor, which was announced nearly three decades earlier. Barring certain apprehensions, the new national education policy tries to bring in a unified system of education across the length and breadth of this vast and diverse country. In this paper, we have critically analyzed the policy and have recommended modifications to ensure a seamless continuum with its predecessor besides increasing its relevance.

Keywords: Education, New Education Policy, Social Development.

INTRODUCTION

India has been known to be a major educational hub from the pre-historic period. Universities at Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi bear testimony to our rich educational heritage. Besides producing scholars of eminence, these seats of learning have contributed to the development of science and technology. Today this vast country is an emerging global economic power and to further augment its prowess requires imparting state-of-the-art education to its citizens through the various channels of distribution. As per the information available, India boasts of more than 845 universities and 40,000 institutes of higher education affiliated to these universities today, which also shows the fragmentation of

higher education in India(Kumar,2004) . Published data also show that about 40% of these institutes cater to a uni-disciplinary programme as against having a multi-disciplinary course content which can give us a leading edge in the 21st century (NEP, 2019). Further, economic and regional imbalances have resulted in low enrolments in many colleges rendering these institutes operationally unviable. Various factors contribute to the fragmentation of the higher education system in India, principal among which are (Aithal and Aithal, 2000)

- Creation of sub-disciplines at an early stage.
- Lack of access to institutes of higher education that can be gauged by the abysmally low levels of enrolment across the spectrum.
- Low level of autonomy in making innovations.
- Lack of research and innovations in higher education.
- Flawed system of regulation.

By the years 2030 to 2032, India plans to become a ten trillion dollar economy making it the third-largest global economy. Needless to say, this mammoth and ambitious goal can be met if the foundations of economic prosperity are changed from natural resource-driven to knowledge-driven. To give a fillip to this endeavor, the present dispensation under Prime Minister Narendra Modi pronounced the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 that inter-alia envisages an India centric education policy that can transform our society into a more vibrant and equitable knowledge society through imparting quality education across all levels(NEP, 2020). This is the third education policy with the first policy frame in post-independent India in 1968, and the second in 1986.

OBJECTIVES

- The new education policy aims to broaden the scope of education in India besides improving the quality of education.
- The objective of this study is confined to understand the loopholes in the existing system of education and to suggest remedial measures.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted discusses the national education policy in light of the judgments passed by the Honorable Supreme Court and compares it with current policies using the process of predictive analysis (Aithal and Aithal, 2020).

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL ASPECTS

Article 21(A) has been inserted into the Indian Constitution in 2002 as a part of the eighty-sixth amendment and it ensures free and compulsory elementary education to all children within the age group six to fourteen years as a fundamental right. In accordance with the spirit of the said article, the present government decided to unify all the education boards across the country into a single board which was met with stiff opposition from various stakeholders. The practicability of the decision and the feasibility of forming a unified education council on the lines of the GST Council was referred to the Hon'ble Supreme Court by Mr. Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay a member of the ruling class and an advocate.

In a plea filed by the government of Tamil Nadu in 2011 challenging the verdict of the Hon'ble Madras High Court which had advocated for uniform education policy, the Supreme Court advocated that Article 21(A) should not be read in seclusion but along with Articles 14 and 15. The court further noted that a "uniform education system would achieve the code of common culture, removal of disparity, depletion of discriminatory values in human relations. It would enhance the virtues and improve the quality of human life, elevate the thoughts which advance our constitutional philosophy of equal society. In the future, it may prove to be a basic preparation for uniform civil code as it may help in diminishing opportunities in those who foment fanatic and fissiparous tendencies" (The Hindu, 2011). Consequent to this decision, Tamil Nadu became the first state to adopt the unified education policy in August 2011.

A CASE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE UNIFIED EDUCATION POLICY

The New Education Policy is well thought of policy and has many merits. We discuss the merits of the policy on two counts: school level and college level. As education is a subject that finds a place in the concurrent list, both the central and the state governments have equal rights in matters of enacting policies. No adherence to a unified education policy would mean benefit to a particular section of learners and deprivation of the other.

SCHOOL STUDENTS

India has been following the 10+2 pattern of education until the higher secondary level with an option to drop out after class 10. This pattern has been replaced with a 5+3+3+4 structure corresponding to the cognitive development stage of a child. Implementation of NEP would allow learners to appear in examinations in classes 3, 5, and 8 as against the present system of appearing in examinations every year. This would decrease the stress among the learners making learning more fun.

Article 21(A) of the constitution guarantees compulsory education up to the primary level. Implementation of NEP would bring in learners beyond this level, and they are also liable to be given free education beyond class 10. This ensures more participation in the secondary level of education.

NEP also stresses skill-based education. It is ironic that while the industrial sector in the country has been lamenting the non-availability of the skilled workforce, the numbers of educated unemployed are also increasing. Imparting skills among the students from a young age would bring in the sense of dignity of labour among the learners and also render them capable of being absorbed by the job market. To quote China which is regarded as among the largest manufacturing hub, many scholars attribute the same to the stress laid upon vocational training. In China, two-thirds of the senior secondary curriculum is dedicated to vocational or skill-based studies (Deccan Chronicle, 2020).

The NEP does away with the streaming of education. Advanced universities of the world allow their students to take up subjects of their choice rather than prescribing certain subjects to choose from. This would enable learners to study multi-disciplinary subjects from different streams as per their interests.

ONE INDIA EDUCATION SYSTEM: THE PROBLEMS

There has been a growing demand for ensuring uniformity in instruction material, type of schooling, syllabus, and pedagogy for long. It has been observed that numerous boards breed inequality among learners and creates an urban-rural divide. Adherence to Article 21(A) of the Indian Constitution, which envisages equal educational opportunity requires providing a similar pattern of learning. The concept of one nation-one education can be the agent that would potentially remove social and economic inequalities from the educational system. We have so many boards, why should we have so many boards in the first place. Let this country have a single board, which will monitor education from a very early stage” (UNESCO, 2013).

India is house to 154 recognized education boards (MHRD, 1986) which are required to be amalgamated into a single education board that would cater to the needs of all the learners. Such an endeavor has become the breeding ground of several doubts principal among which include:

- Objectives of the common board
- Education year
- Curriculum design
- Incorporation of the languages
- Protection of local interests and cultures

India is a country having wide disparity be it landscape, weather, culture, language, and history, among others. People belonging to different regions desire to embed their culture and history as a part of their educational curriculum. India is among the nations having a large population of youth aspiring for diverse career opportunities, have varied orientations for learning, and different interests. As such, the feasibility of a unified education system remains doubtful.

The priorities that go into curriculum designing is also an area of concern for policymakers. In the subject of literature, for example, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) incorporates works of prominent Indian writers as a part of its curriculum as against the state boards which emphasizes works of renowned writers of their respective regions. Further, the main language in any particular state or region becomes an optional language in other regions nullifying the effect of unification.

Various education boards scattered across the states have their unique syllabi that are the culmination of the history and the culture of the respective states. This diversity is the core tenet of the democratic education system that we practice in India. Implementation of a common syllabus would thwart this process. Proficiency in primary education translates into specialized education at college and university levels. In the formative stages of development, the syllabus should focus on providing diverse knowledge regarding socio-cultural aspects and environmental surroundings rather than orienting itself towards a future-directed specialized knowledge.

It has also been argued by psychologists that every child is unique in the scope of learning, making homogeneity a far-fetched process (Gupta, 2019). Learning is a process that lays the road from the known to the unknown. As such, trying to acquaint a child with the unknown in the early stages of learning can prove detrimental.

As per the report published by the All India Education Survey, 2002, there are more than 1.3 million recognized educational institutions in India teaching from primary to higher secondary standards in both government and private sectors besides a host of unrecognized hubs (Yaspal, 1992). Regulation and supervision of these institutions which entail matters of maintenance, quality, and administration have to be thoroughly reviewed. It has also been voiced by many that the process of unification is a direct violation of the tenets of Article 246 of the Constitution of India which places education in the Concurrent List giving certain obligations to governments at both the central and the state levels. This step is also in contradiction to the report presented by Prof. Yashpal to the Government of India (english.gov.cn, 2019).

The Road Ahead The role of primary education in laying the foundation of all aspects of development, psychological, moral, cultural, educational, in a child is undeniable. Besides facilitating learning experiences, primary education also helps children in the development of life skills. It is, therefore, imperative that India lays focus on achieving 100% literacy, especially in the primary stages. The Right to Education Act, 2009 has been a step in this direction. The act propels the states to ensure free and compulsory education to all children below 14 years of age.

- The data emanating from the census of 2011, however, conveys a dismal state of affairs with 6.5 million children being kept out of the purview of the formal education system (edudel.nic.in, 2020) due to poor economic conditions making them join the work-force.

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization had in its report dated 2016 (english.gov.cn, 2019), states that the number of school dropouts after the 10th standard is very high in India at 47 million students.
- It is, therefore, imperative on the part of the central government to enact policies that restrict such practices. Both the central and the state governments should work in unison to usher in a state of universalization of primary education as per the National Policy on Education, 1986(ASER,2019) under its flagship programs like the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan.
- India ranks 62nd as regards public spending of primary and secondary education with 3% of the GDP being earmarked for the purpose during 2018-2019(NASSCOM community, 2020). In absolute terms, the figure stands at 5.6 lakh crores. In comparison with China, it is observed that during 2019 China spent 520 billion \$ on education or 4.11% of its GDP (english.gov.cn, 2019).. The United District Information System for Education in its report for 2019-20(edudel.nic.in, 2020 confirmed the presence of more than 92,000 schools in India both at the primary and the secondary levels that are running with one teacher only. The report further states that most of the schools are understaffed.



Fig 1: Graph showing the states having schools with one teacher only.

- Understaffed schools pose a problem that causes deterioration in the quality of education imparted by the teachers present as they have less scope for preparation which is essential for quality education. To lessen the burden on the existing teachers, schools usually go for ad-hoc appointments, thereby recruiting incompetent faculties. Further, to augment their income, the teachers posted in rural areas often resort to other businesses neglecting their primary job.

During their study, Jeevan and Townsend (2013) found certain disturbing facts regarding the education system prevalent in India. The findings of the study included:

- A high percentage of abstinence among various teachers in various states.
- Quality education is not affordable to the vast majority of the students.
- The government and government-aided schools have failed to live up to their expectations and do not possess a good image among the people.

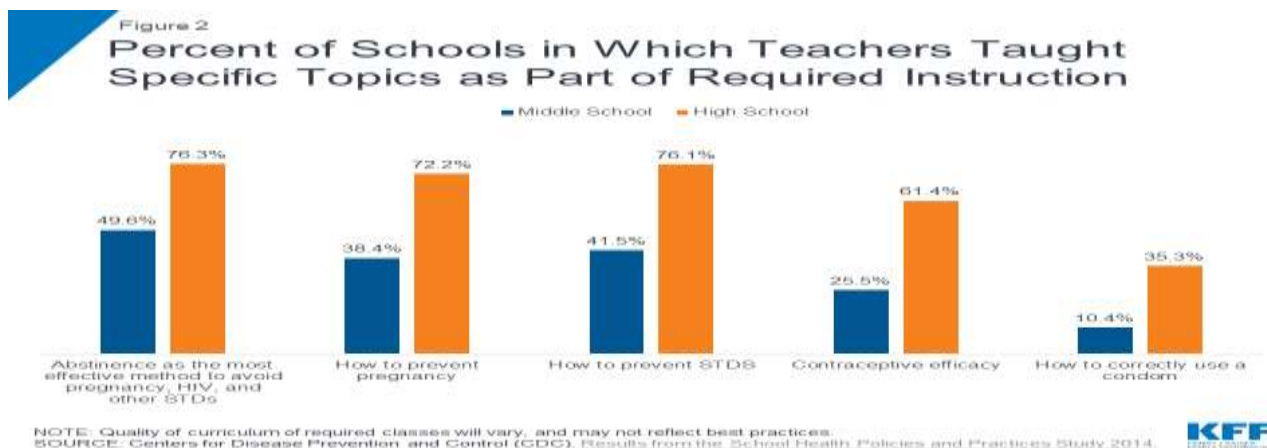


Fig 2: Graph showing the states with a high percentage of teacher abstinence

The government should enhance its spending on primary and secondary education, making teaching a viable earning proposition. This would induce good students to take up teaching as a career and would also allow them to distance themselves from scouting for other avenues. The administration can then become more stringent in matters of abstaining from duties and the like. The focus should also be laid on the development of infrastructure, aspects of governance to ensure quality education among the students.

The Rural Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2019 ‘Early Years’ (ASER, 2019) , depicts a horrific state of affairs in the educational scenario in the country, particularly in the primary education sector. The report states the following:-

- Low level of proficiency and competence among the learners, especially in the rural areas despite the help meted out by the governments to the students of the state-run schools.
- It appears that the students have not been able to do justice. The proficiency of a middle-level student is below that of a primary level learner and so forth.
- Students of Class 5 in many government schools are unable to read textbooks prescribed for Class 2 students. Similarly, students of Class 8 have expressed their inability to solve arithmetic problems of Class 5.
- Learners also have to face language barriers. Despite having a national language and the states having their respective state languages, higher and technical education is imparted in English. To date, we have not seen any technical reading material being translated into either the national language or the state language. All the major countries of the world have succeeded in doing so. China, Germany, France, Russia, and others teach their students at all levels, including technical levels, in their respective national languages. So that the learners consider themselves job-ready after their stint in their educational institutes and their future growth, knowledge of English is necessary.
- The central government should consider plugging these deficiencies and aim towards ushering in improvements in the standard of learning of these groups of learners.

In the areas of Internet and Communication Technology, the United District Information System for Education data for 2019-20(edudel.nic.in, 2020) indicates as under

- Only 12% of rural schools have functional computers which rather than being used as a tool for imparting knowledge, find utility in routine official work.
- 55.8% of rural schools have an electricity supply.
- Six states have recorded as having both computers and electricity at less than 2%

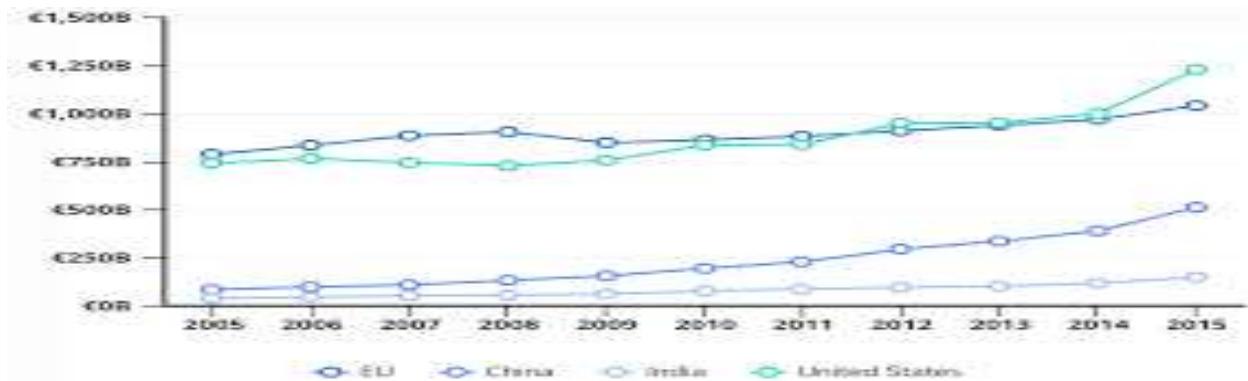


Fig 3: Graph showing the states having schools with less number of computers and electricity

To fulfill our desire to find ourselves in the list of developed nations, our focus should shift towards a knowledge-driven economy. As a nation having the largest youth population, a proper education policy would provide the required impetus for the realization of our aspirations. Further, most of the schools in state boards have incorporated the same textbooks as prescribed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training. Despite the change of syllabi, the students of state boards are unable to cope with CBSE students when it comes to securing admissions into technical institutes. The problem, therefore, lies not in the content of the syllabi but the quality of teaching and available infrastructure. Stress should be laid to eradicate the same by adherence to proper procedures.

The unified system of education has borne fruits in many of the smaller countries of the world. It can, therefore, be considered vital, but doubts raised by academicians and people in public life make it seem unjustifiable in the present context. Referring to the Supreme Court judgment delivered in 2011 and its subsequent implementation by the state of Tamil Nadu, it can be said that the adoption of uniform education policy has been effective but pan-India implementation requires appraisal in qualitative and quantitative terms.

CONCLUSION

It is the dream of every parent to see their wards reach the pinnacle of achievement in their lives that can aid in attaining a previously unattained economic status. The fact that India aspires to be a five trillion-dollar economy by the year 2024 can be met if we decrease our dependence on natural resources and concentrate on a knowledge-driven economy. This calls for a solid foundation in the primitive stages of the children,

which they will be able to carry in the later stages of their academic lives. Further, our education should be industry-oriented, and the candidates should be job-ready immediately upon completion of their education. Also, our focus of research should not be diluted as this is one of the criteria of international rankings of institutes of higher education. In consonance with this information and also the undeniable fact that students from the Central Board of Secondary Education have an upper hand in almost all major competitive examinations in sharp contrast to students from other boards, the need for a unified education system seems justified. But there are also areas of concern.

We need not reiterate the fact that India has led the world in the field of education, and we need to get our past glory back.

Any decision in this regard should take into consideration the diversity that the country has and should uphold the spirit of the same. As an alternative, the government, leading scholars, academicians, public personalities, and other stake-holders may decide upon other ways of upliftment like infrastructure improvement, changing the curriculum in tune with the present requirements after a certain level, better administration, and transparency in faculty recruitment, among others.

It is a fact that countries like Finland and others have been following a uniform education policy. Also, the United States of America and China have adopted a uniform examination policy for admission into its colleges in the form of the Scholastic Assessment Test and the National Higher Secondary Entrance Examination (Gao Kao) respectively. In India also, we have been following a single examination for entry into professional institutes like engineering, medical, management, etc. Smaller countries having a common history, culture, and language can opt for a common education policy, but countries divided by such barriers would find the implementation of such a concept difficult. In the United States of America and China, which also have diversities, education has not been unified. In light of what has been mentioned above, a feasibility study needs to be undertaken amidst the cross-cultural settings.

In our opinion, a unified education policy will instill a deep-rooted pride among the learners in being Indian in all aspects, including thought, intellect, spirit, and deeds. The New Education Policy will also transform our learners into responsible citizens who are committed to human rights and would bring in sustainable development, making them truly global citizens.

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