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NEW WAYS TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

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Abstract:

In the post COVID era as we navigate the haze of online and hybrid teaching and learning models, there is a lot of speculation on the future of education more so higher education. Instead of only depending on the board curriculum schools need to take a new approach to the pedagogical structure. Up-skilling will help teachers adopt new technologies and the future of education rests more on creativity and therefore technology is to be treated as an enabler and a multiplier and not as the main product. Understanding the hybrid mode of education helps students get time to understand the concepts that need extra reinforcement. Does the future of education lie in digital? This paper ponders on these points.

Key Words: Hybrid teaching-learning, NEP, Technology

Introduction

In 2020 the government introduced the National Policy NEP, 2020 with the intention to revolutionize the education system. The scope of this new policy spans a broad spectrum, that is, from elementary level to university level. NEP is expected to create a profound impact on the career of students and the experts are hopeful that the new policy will make the education system more flexible, advanced and scientific.

Our existing education system focuses more on the theoretical knowledge rather than practical implementation. The lack of flexibility in opting for a particular mix of subjects is another concern. To change all these, a new system was essential. However, we cannot draw any conclusion about the policy at this critical stage. Though NEP promises several changes, the real impact can only be understood after its implementation at the school level. NEP was framed to break the shackles and reform education so that students can leverage their true potentials.

NEP 2020 prioritizes quality education. It is a comprehensive policy that aims for India to have a "second to none" education system by 2040 with equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners

regardless of social or economic background. The focus is squarely on 'quality' education-models that are holistic, with multi-disciplinary, 'liberal studies' and research based curricula, offering the flexibility of choice and duration, along with inclusivity, life-long learning, and with autonomy within a regulatory framework. All noble objectives indeed, and we will need to translate these fine words into measurable, distinct interventions at the national, regional and individual institutional levels. The NEP recognizes and put emphasis on the use of technology in education. But this can be approached from a different lens. The buzzword of the era is 'digital', but "digital-first" is an enabling tool for achieving the real goal of higher education today and tomorrow.

An education system of quality should attempt to get all the learners reach their distinctive and full capacity and enter the global society as dynamic citizens. Higher education should focus entirely on the learner, preparing them for life and not merely a certification. The rational of higher education is to create future leaders with life skills that do not become outdated-creative people, capable of critical thinking and hence logical decision making. Technology is not a solution by itself for all our problems. The need of the hour is creativity- leading to research and development for a sustainable world. From an India-centric lens, 'Make in India' needs to evolve to 'Make by India' from aiming to be a country of factory workers to a country of innovators, from creating the labour force to creating future leaders. If the NEP's goal for 2040 is to be met, it can only be done through an educational system that prioritizes the formation of innovative solutions. Therefore technology is to be treated as an enabler and a multiplier and not as the main product.

Strong Foundation

In India many schools, students are expected to memorize the content rather than focus on understanding the concept. Therefore, even at a younger age, students face difficulties when they are shifted from playschools to formal education. A strong foundational education is required to help the child as he grows older and starts learning new topics. Almost 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs before the age of six. Therefore early childhood care and education is crucial which is possible through 5+3+3+4 model by the government. In this model, the pedagogical system is divided to include children in the age group of 3-5 from the informal education sector.

Introducing coding lessons early; child's mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early days of education, will help open up opportunities for the children and make them understand concepts better.

Schools can implement NEP by changing the pedagogical structure they follow and also by up-skilling teachers to address the gaps in the education system.

In House Curriculum

Private schools are already focusing on early childhood care and education. Many schools have introduced flexible curriculum for the students to help in their holistic development. Each child should be encourages to adopt activities like book reading, participating in special events, to enable them to realize their full potentials. These should be encouraged in every child to bring out the best in them.

The major enablers in bringing transformation in pedagogy are teachers. Up-skilling them with different training programs will help them adapt the new methods.

- Experimental learning has to be given more prominence and teachers need to help students think creatively. This will develop curiosity among students.
- The focus should be STEM education
- Innovative teaching strategies should be introduced using new technologies
- Preferences should be given conceptual understanding rather than rote learning.

Understanding the Hybrid Mode of Education

During the pandemic, over the past 16 months schools and higher education institutions in India and abroad have discovered that the hybrid mode of education is an effective tool for teaching-learning. It combines classroom (face to face) and remote mode. Initially, institutions shifted to online for continuing of education during COVID 19 pandemic. Over a period of time, information and communication technology (ICT) enabled remote teaching proved to be useful for providing flexibility and more engaging experiences for students.

Hybrid learning, also referred to as blended learning, is an approach to education that combines online educational materials with traditional in-person classroom methods. It's not fully virtual nor is it fully digital. This form of education helps the student to gradually move to a self-directed learning style. Students get time to understand concepts that need extra reinforcement and explanation, lab time for productive hands-on experience where warranted and remote interaction to help with basic questions. Another important benefit of hybrid mode is that it aids classroom teaching with asynchronous learning tools like prerecorded videos/ e-assessments/ quiz and online exercise etc, to make learning more effective and customized. The hybrid mode of education not only offers students the equivalent learning outcomes by engaging learning activities in all participation modes, but it also provides student review time to revisit the learning material and assessments any number of times to successfully complete assignments within the study period.

The fundamental tools for the hybrid mode of education are:

- Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and Video Conferencing
- Learning Management System (LMS)
- Pre-recorded video instructions and short videos
- Online Library Resource
- Online exercises and group based activities
- Virtual Classroom and Virtual Labs
- Online submission of assignment and evaluation

Advantages of Hybrid Learning

For the hybrid learning environment to be truly fruitful, it needs a specifically planned curriculum that involves a different set of strategies from those deployed in a physical classroom. It can be said that in the impending future, there is room for all models of teaching and learning to grow, namely in-person, online and hybrid learning. However, we cannot disagree that hybrid learning is prepared to grow significantly. Hybrid learning effectively combines the advantages of personalization with ease to offer a learning environment that is best suited to address the changing needs of students in the present times. Below are some exceptional advantages of the hybrid model of learning:

- **Customized Personalized Learning**: The hybrid approach to learning makes it possible for every student to learn at a speed that is comfortable for them, thereby increasing retention. Students can participate in a variety of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities that are aligned to their learning styles, thereby helping them gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Because of a smaller group, teacher – student exchanges can be much more modified and effective.
- **Improved flexibility**: A hybrid approach gives control to the learners over the time, place and speed of learning. This flexibility often translates to increased attendance and involvement in the classes.
- **Advanced evaluation and reporting**: Comprehensive student evaluations, peer benchmarking facilities and granular reporting are all made possible through the use of technology in the Hybrid learning model.
- **Immediate Feedback**: Personalized assessments, participation in live lectures, live chats with teachers are ways of providing immediate feedback to students that is very valuable for learning.
- **Use of technology to increase capacity of personalization and engagement**: Use of Artificial Intelligence will help to customize learning to suit different learning styles, that eventually leads to better learning outcomes. Gamification, self-paced learning, short videos with inter-leaved exercises are different ways in which technology can help make the hybrid learning environment more productive.
- **Saves precious time, money and energy spent on commuting long distances**
- **Students become independent learners:** In a hybrid approach to learning, the learner has considerable responsibility to complete the learning task. This helps the student to steadily move to a self-directed learning style – a style of learning that is very useful in the long run, mainly for higher studies.

How do we succeed?

Hybrid learning is here to stay. It is up to us as education technologists to devise learning environments that merge the best of both the in-person learning environment and the online learning space. Hybrid mode requires more preparation than the traditional teaching and learning methods. Listed below are some points to be considered that will make the hybrid learning model a successful one:

- **Employ Technology** – To keep track of where students are slackening and to make the teaching-learning process more interactive
- **Taking steps to conquer the 'Digital Divide'** that may pose as a considerable barrier for parity in remote instruction.
- **Program Design and Lesson Plan** – The teachers will need to organize their lessons in a different way to make it more focused and planned as class time will be restricted and teaching will have to be more focused. Create most of your online content before the start of the semester.
- **Parents and guardians become very significant stakeholders** in a child's learning to ensure that the child is completing the work that is assigned to her
- **Role of Teachers as 'mentors'** – Teachers will be required to regularly connect and encourage learners so as to help them find ways to exceptional challenges brought upon them because of the unprecedented pandemic. Determining learning outcomes is also important.

For ample hybrid learning environment, it needs a specific designed curriculum that involves a different set of planning from those used in a physical classroom. Education Technologists need to design learning network that unites the best of in-person learning environment and the online learning environment. Technology can be used to keep track of where students are slackening.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 is an important landmark in the history of the education system in India. It will grant the much-needed tectonic shift in the pedagogical structure emphasizing experiential and practical learning that will instill 21st-century skills in children. It will also identify the need to evaluate "higher order skills" such as creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, visualization, and idea generation. The pandemic forced educational institutions and educators to test out 'online' as an option in imparting education. Hybrid learning lends an opportunity to personalize and regain instructional time in a hybrid schedule. With most sectors moving to the digital platform, India needs to produce an army of tech-enabled youngsters willing to take calculated risks.

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