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REFORMS IN EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is vital Human Resources development. India has done fairly well in education sector since independence and is reflective in its growth and development trajectory. Indian Education System is under review for at least last 6 to 8 years and Draft National Education Policy (NEP) was released for public review and comments since May 2019. The policy beholds a vision for next two decades and has consolidated past reforms to make them current and relevant. Current status of educational sector has been analysed in this article through the perspective of NEP, for its proposed reforms and likely impact thereto. Population, Societal Aspirational, Market Forces and Technology are key drivers that affect educational sector. In addition, reforms in India should focus on Population, Polity, Demography and Learners Profile and their strong interplay while designing and implementing reforms. NEP has proposed a plethora of reforms in almost all levels, primarily to enhance quality of education, accessibility, equity and affordability. Regularity and Monitoring mechanism has been given renewed focus. So is the three language formula, teacher's education, accountability of schools, etc. While the policy gives adequate flexibility and scope for quick adaption with changing needs, it lacks clarity in some of the areas. Further, the responsibility and freedom of state governments are also vague. Expecting substantial funding from state governments and private partnerships also need more analysis. Draft NEP 2019 is a comprehensive document that analyses the current system and proposes several new initiatives for next two decades. However, its success depends largely on implementation, commitment and resourcing.

Introduction

1. Learning is an existential need and an intrinsic process that is lifelong. Education is a structured form of learning, primarily pursued in early part of life, which enhances effectiveness of learning exponentially. Timely pursued, education is a force multiplier in a learning curve and is indicative of the societal status. Education is omnipresent in all factors of National Security, and can be seen as its plasma. Every country, irrespective of its development status, continues to invest substantially in the educational sector. Every government endeavours its best in this critical area albeit with varied success and effectiveness. India has done fairly well in educational

sector since independence and is reflective in its growth and development trajectory. Indian Education System is under review for at least last 6 to 8 years and Draft National Education Policy (NEP)¹ was released for public review and comments since May 2019. The policy beholds a vision for next two decades and has consolidated past reforms to make them current and relevant. In this article, the reforms proposed in Draft NEP are analysed for their likely impact.

2. **Aim.** The aim of this article is to study the Education Sector of India and suggest improvements.
3. **Scope.** The study is focused on Education Sector of India and a detailed analysis of Draft NEP 2019.
4. **Layout.** Following aspects are covered in the article:-
 - (a) Drivers and Nuances.
 - (b) Present System.
 - (c) Proposals in Draft NEP 2019.
 - (d) Observations and Recommendations.

Drivers and Nuances

5. It is essential to base any study on a well defined framework with common understanding of objectives, drivers and nuances. Education being the lifeline of mankind, everyone has an opinion or two about the same. Understanding the nuances of the system will help the reader to assimilate various facets of reforms in correct perspective, at national level.

6. **Key Drivers.** Universally education is affected by four key drivers as discussed below. These drivers have strong interplay as depicted in the causal loop in Figure 1.

- (a) **Economy.** Education and Economy are closely linked. Better the economy, more possibilities in educational investment, which help economy to grow faster. It is thus a positively reinforcing loop.
- (b) **Societal Needs.** The priorities of the society are also dynamic and deeply woven into its economic trajectory. It can be further dissected from regional, national and global perspectives.

¹ Draft National Education policy 2019 accessed at https://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/Draft_NEP_2019_EN_Revised.pdf

(c) **Market Forces**. While economic trajectory and societal needs are fairly stable, market forces are strong, dynamic and with high inertia. Effectiveness of any social reform is therefore contingent on correct reading and forecast of market forces.

(d) **Technology**. Like education, technology too is omnipresent and should be correctly identified and harnessed. Technology in Education and Education in Technology are two rhyming but distinct twins.

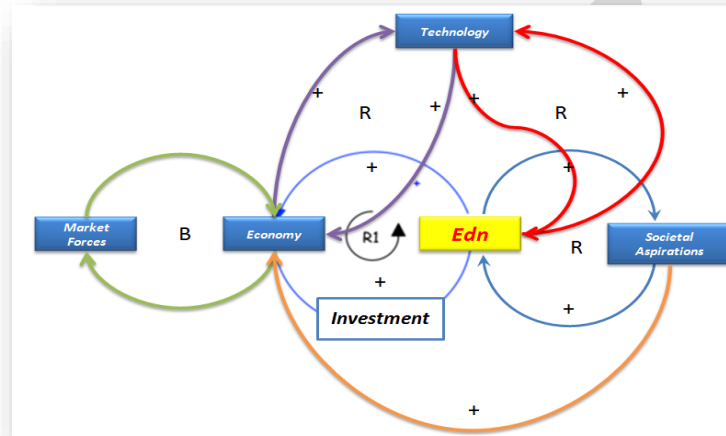


Figure 1 : Causal Loop of Key Drivers of Education

7. **Nuances of Indian Education System**. In addition to the above, Indian Education System is characterized by four key nuances as shown in Figure 2 and are deliberated in succeeding paras.

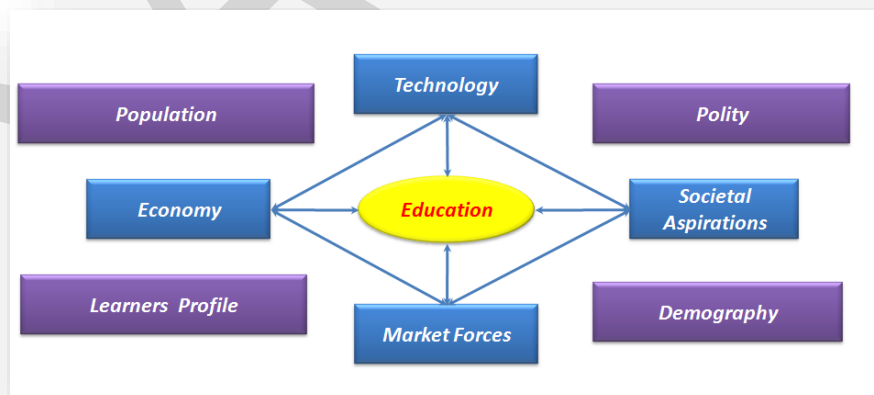


Figure 2 : Nuances of Indian Education System

8. **Population.**

(a) Population of India is always an essential factor in any of its reforms. Diversity in Culture and Languages merit due attention. They are mutually enriching and have strong impact on education.

(b) Every system is innately resistant to change. Educational System is no exception. With such huge and diverse population system inertia and associated latency should be considered in planning. The changes are not readily felt nor the immediate results are indicative of eventual outcome.

9. **Demographic Dividend.** India's seemingly advantageous demographic profile should be handled with caution as it may turn out to be counter-productive, if not harnessed in time.

10. **Learners Profile.** Present digital generation has a distinctly different learners profile as described below:-

(a) Unlike in the past, the learners are amidst a ***media rich environment*** with computers, mobile phones, television, internet, etc. Access to information of any kind is almost always guaranteed. Asynchronous, Ubiquitous and Diverse knowledge access enables intelligent and adaptive learning.

(b) Present generation can be termed as **Plug n Play generation**. The learning /teaching paradigm has to adapt dynamically. Teachers can no longer be Sages on Stages. Learners behavioural and thought pattern (possibly consequential of ser (a)) is non-linear and seek parallel learning processes. Team centric approach and collaborative learning are inevitable.

(c) Customised Education is more of norm and less of exception. Shrinking attention and memory span necessitates more focus on experiential / experimental learning and participative approach.

(d) Most importantly, the inertia associated with the **first generation literacy** is something that should be treated with over-riding priority.

11. **Polity.**

(a) Education being a subject in **concurrent list** demands substantial amount of coordination and cooperation between Central and State Governments. While planning, coordination, standardization, policy reforms, funding, etc may be ensured by the Centre, the ultimate outcome is more of State Governments responsibility. Such dual

responsibility also gives scope for mutual distrust and blame, which is inevitable in cooperative federalism.

(b) Priorities of each state will vary, based on their *economic status*. Thus, it is not one size fits all. On the other hand, there has to be some standardization / uniformity in educational standards being pursued. Further, the rural-urban differentials also ought to be balanced. The *geographic conditions* especially in mountainous areas and remote villages, where population is sparse and children have to move large distances to schools, will also have hampering effect.

Present System

12. India has done reasonably well in the educational sector, since independence. The positives and negatives of the same are discussed in succeeding paras.

13. Positives.

(a) The *versatility* of Indian Education System is palpable from adoption and achievement of Indians abroad, both in commercial ventures as well as research and development. India, while protecting its plurality in languages amongst its citizens, have a huge *English speaking population*. Majority of success of Indians abroad stems from this singular advantage. Further, service sector and tourism benefit immensely from such global languages.

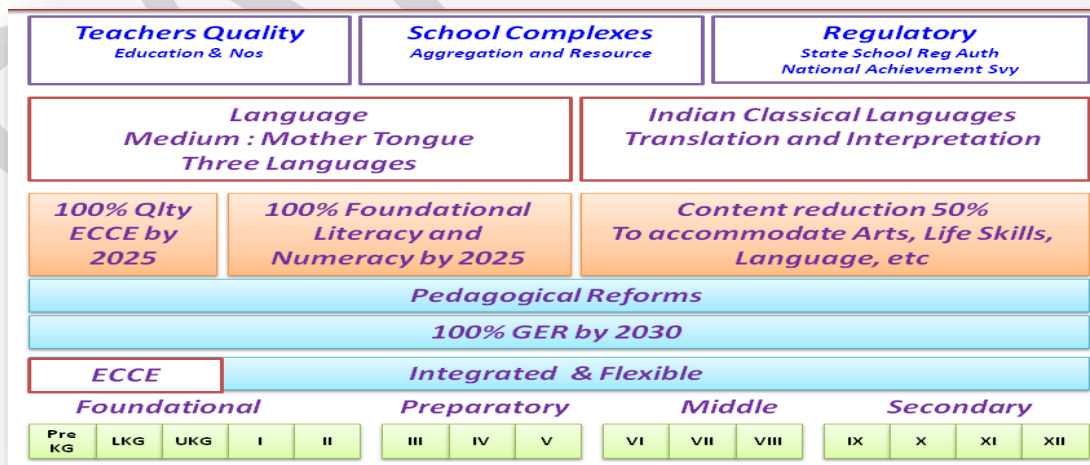


Figure 3 : Reforms in School Education in NEP 2019

- (b) Continuing education and **Adult Education** have been given renewed focus in last two to three decades and helped improving overall literacy rates. It offers sufficient avenues for ensuring lifelong learning activities of the society.
- (c) The **Right to Education** has been successfully implemented and is now being widened to cover 3 years to 18 years bracket.
- (d) Country has done substantially well in the **Education of Girl Children**, with recent statistics indicating that their Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is better than boys in all segments². Free Higher Education for Girls is being granted by few states while others are offering various schemes to promote girls in higher education as well.
- (e) Towards inclusive growth, educational system has devised and absorbed reservation system for the underprivileged in terms of **Caste and Economic Status**.

14. **Negatives.**

- (a) The **quality of education** in the country is not up to the mark as seen from School Educational Quality Index³ (SEI) report. The fact that 49% of students in 5th standard could not read the text of 2nd standard as per 2016 survey indicates the void. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)⁴ assessment 2018, in which Indian Children stood at 73 out of 74 schools indicates the lack of quality in our education system. especially at primary and secondary levels.
- (b) Being a developing country, the **resource crunch** should always be balanced amongst competing priorities. While surveys indicate availability of adequate number of schools, it is the non-availability of quality teachers, curriculum, delivery mechanism and governing mechanism that plague the system. Sanjeev Sanyal observes that India presently have more than adequate number of schools and the School to Children ratio in some villages is 1: 30 or below⁵.
- (c) The system is very demanding and focused more on scores, which leads to rote learning with little concept development. Consequent **stress on the children** and parents

² Budget Speech 2020 of Finance Minister accessed at <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budgetspeech.php>

³ SEI Report 2018 accessed at <https://niti.gov.in/content/school-education-quality-index>

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

⁵ Educational Reforms : Complete Change Of Framework Needed in India | Sanjeev Sanyal | #SrijanTalks) accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTCcKpyQ6GY>

is very high. Rote learning and stress on scores have deprived the students of their innate skills and *creativity*. Most of the students choose their educational leanings based on societal and parental compulsions.

(d) The education system is to be aligned with the requirements of the employment opportunities, relevance and aspirations of the society. A vision and forecast of *skills* required for the *development* of the country in long term goals is required to provide direction for quality and quantity of higher education.

(e) Consequent to ibid factors, students end up with *flock mentality* and prefer to go-through-the-motion rather than trying anything new. It promotes and sustains mediocrity and curbs innovation. The same is equally applicable for teachers and institutions.

(f) India has adequate number of schools barring few remote areas. The *liberal licensing* of education especially in mid-eighties could substantially ensure adequate availability of educational institutions. However, over a period of time, these institutions have become more of a commercial venture and less of academic excellence.

Proposals in Draft NEP 2019

15. Draft NEP, was released by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) in May 2019 for public comments and suggestions. Since then it has attracted more than two lakhs suggestions for improvement that are being worked upon by the committee. It is likely to be released by Apr 2020. The committee, headed by ex ISRO chief, Dr Kasturi Rangan, was constituted in June 2017 which primarily addresses the accessibility, equity, affordability and accountability issues faced by the present system. Some of the key features, issues addressed and likely challenges are outlined in succeeding paras.

16. **School Education**. The major changes proposed for School Education have been abstracted and shown in Figure 3 for easy assimilation and are outlined as under:-

(a) ***Pedagogical Scheme*** has been restructured as 5+3+3+4 design, covering the age group of 3 to 18 years as shown in the Figure 3.

(b) Universal pre primary education by 2025, providing foundational literacy and numeracy for all by 2025 and 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in school education by 2030

are being targeted. ECCE is being integrated with Anganwadis and their health care essentials.⁶

(c) **Multilingualism** is being promoted, as children have the capability to quickly learn multiple languages in the age group of 2 to 8 years. To this effect, three language systems have been proposed. Emphasis on mother tongue based ECCE is another important effort to enhance quality and effectiveness of education and culture. In addition to the above, learning of classical languages like Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Odia, Persian, Pali, Prakrit, etc are being encouraged.

(d) The initiative of **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**⁷ to create a more holistic, unified education system, with greater continuity from age of 3 to 18, and a Foundation stage that ensures greater school readiness when children begin primary school, is being given a renewed focus.

(e) The policy proposes **State Census Examinations** in classes three, five and eight. Further, it recommends restructuring the board examinations to test only core concepts, skills and higher order capacities.

(f) The policy recommends **School Complexes** as a potential solution to enable peer support, sharing of resources and improved governance. A complex will consist of one secondary school and all the public schools in its neighbourhood that offer education from preprimary till class 8. The school complexes will also include Anganwadis, vocational education facilities and an adult education centre. Each school complex will be a semi-autonomous unit providing integrated education across all stages from early childhood to secondary education.

(g) While there has been a rapid increase in the number of **private schools** since 2000, ASER reports (rural only) indicate that the ‘year on year increase in private school enrolment seems to have stopped’ at primary level, reporting of the proportion of private

⁶ Sustainable Development Goals for India accessed at Niti Ayog site
https://niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2019-12/SDG-India-Index-2.0_27-Dec.pdf

⁷ Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Dept of School Education & Literacy, MHRD
<http://samagra.mhrd.gov.in/>

schools at 31 per cent in both 2016 and 2018⁸. The policy proposes a number of measures to ensure stricter regulation of private schools, expressing concern at the ‘rampant commercialization of private schools’.

(h) **The National Educational Technology Forum**, to support future initiatives and research, is proposed. The policy recognises four key areas where technology can benefit education in India:-

- (i) Teacher training and continuous professional development.
 - (ii) Classroom processes.
 - (iii) Access to disadvantaged groups.
 - (iv) Administration and management.
- (j) The existing ***B.Ed. programme*** is being replaced by a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme that combines high quality content, pedagogy and practical training. An integrated continuous professional development will also be developed for all subjects. Teachers are required to complete a minimum of 50 hours of continuous professional development training every year.

Higher Education and Research

17. The major changes proposed for Higher Education and Research are as under :-

- (a) Universities and colleges are proposed for ***consolidation and restructuring***. It proposes for consolidation of current 800 universities and 40,000 colleges into about 15,000 large, well-resourced, vibrant multidisciplinary institutions, teaching in various disciplines and fields including in rural/ remote areas. The higher education institutes are planned to consolidate into three types of Institutes, as under:-
 - (i) Research Universities.
 - (ii) Teaching Universities.
 - (iii) Autonomous colleges granting degrees.
- (b) There will also be larger **autonomy** to all HEIs and will be governed by Boards with Academic Freedom and Administrative Autonomy.

⁸ The Thirteenth Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018)
<https://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aser2018pressreleaseenglish.pdf>

(c) **National Higher Education Regulatory Authority** for all higher and professional education is being set up. University Grants Commission will change as Higher Education Grants Council. General Education Council will focus on National Higher Education Qualifications Framework. In addition, following forums proposed for establishment:-

- (i) National Research Foundation (NRF).
 - (ii) National Education Commission.
 - (iii) National Education Technology Forum.
- (d) MHRD is proposed to be re-designated as the **Ministry of Education** (MoE).
- (e) **Online learning** is considered to supplement and complement educational system, in harmony with technology⁹. It will also enable to conserve on costs and increasing GER.
- (f) All higher education institutions to become autonomous self-governing entities. They are to be governed by **Independent Boards** with complete autonomy. All institutions would be free to start and run their own programmes, decide curricula, student capacity and resource requirements and develop internal systems for management.
- (g) There is a proposed increase in the public investment in educational reforms by the Central and State Governments up to 20% of overall public expenditure, which is targeted to be achieved in next 10 years. Engaging the private sectors and funding by Government for R&D through National Research Fund are also being endeavoured.

Observations and Recommendations

18. While the policy gives adequate flexibility and scope for quick adaptation with changing needs, it lacks clarity in some of the areas that are outlined in succeeding paras. It is likely that most of these voids will be addressed before the release of the policy.

19. Right to Education with No Detention Policy up to Eighth Grade has deprived the student's responsibility towards quality education. Thus ensuring higher GER post Grade VIII

⁹ Budget Speech 2020 of Finance Minister accessed at <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budgetspeech.php>

will continue to be a challenge and will also seriously undermine the quality of education. It is essential to focus on robust and continuous assessment mechanism to ensure quality.

20. With yet to be realized infrastructure, sudden extension of RTE coverage by another five years will have its hampering effect on quality of education in other states as well. Although apparently there is no urgency for enhancing to Grade IX to XII.

21. The focus on Pedagogy is welcome, but it lacks clarity on implementation. There is no solution being put forth for offsetting poor quality and accountability of the teachers and schools. It reiterates the existing but ineffective systems like School Management Committees. The framework for governing bodies has to be defined with role, responsibility and power.

22. Education is presently in concurrent list making Centre and State equally responsibly with due freedom and accountability. The draft NEP is silent on the role and responsibility of state governments towards education to the masses. The proposed Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA) lead by PM though has members from States, should not deprive their freedom and accountability, and ultimately make education a responsibility of Centre only. RSA expects to bring medical, agricultural and legal education under one umbrella, which may face stiff opposition.

23. In the exuberance of promoting regional and classical languages, in addition to Hindi, the importance of English is being neglected. The importance of English, a global language, and its associated benefits especially in service industry cannot be lost sight of. Implementation of languages and associated issues has to be handled sensitively in view of the emotional overtones, as witnessed recently in some parts of the country.

24. Doubling of public funding (to 6% of the GDP) and increasing overall public expenditure on education to 20% (from current 10% or less), may be desirable but is not likely to materialize in the near future, especially if the additional funding are to be subscribed by States. Expecting philanthropists and Commercial organizations to enhance their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the fields of education should be handled carefully, as it may not be ideologically neutral.

25. The National Research Foundation (NRF) tasked with “permeating the culture of research and innovation while addressing societal challenges” is not seemed to be supported with innovative content in education or extension programmes.

26. The policy is silent on the Institutions of Eminence and their funding policy and agencies.

Conclusion

27. Education is a vital force multiplier of societal progress. India, though have done satisfactorily in this front, endeavours to promote education sector for economic and social reforms. Draft NEP 2019 is a comprehensive document that analyses the current system and proposes several new initiatives for next two decades. However, its success depends largely on implementation, commitment and resourcing.

(3020 words)