

How National Education Policy 2020 can be a lodestar to transform future generation in India

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Developments across the board require an educational backup which requires a robust educational system. The last 50 years have witnessed big leap transformation of applications supported by advancements in science and technology. Even today due to the fast advancement it is difficult to evaluate how usage shapes up in the near future. This requires an upgraded educational structure to cope with the challenges. India has over 1/sixth of the human force representation on the global map and it should contribute strongly to the global development in sync with the human force representation on earth. India responded slowly to the upgradation gap in the education policy and came up with a new one after a gap of 34 years. The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India provides a comprehensive framework from primary education to higher education, vocational & technical education and a new paradigm of internet-based e-learning. Five founding pillars of this policy (i.e., Access, equity, affordability, accountability, and quality) have been considered to build the new education system of India to create a perfect harmony with the principles of United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda for sustainable development. However, the successful implementation of this policy requires a significant structural overhaul in the Indian education system. This paper provides insights into various contours of NEP 2020 and how it aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 targets. This paper looks at how India should step up with caution to achieve the objectives. The paper presents some major loopholes and execution challenges that need to be addressed to truly foster “quality education for all” with the objective of providing value to the globe.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to build human capital and an equitable society. The quality of education system to a large extent determines innovations, economic growth, social justice, and equity in any country (Ball, 2016; Mundy, Green, Lingard, & Verger, 2016). Article 26 of the declaration on Human Rights adopted in United Nations (1948) states that education must be free and compulsory at least in elementary stages to strengthen and protect fundamental the freedom of people (Claude, 2005). In this sense, Right to Education Act 2009 was enacted in India to enforce education as a fundamental right and access of primary education for children aged between 6–14 years.

Further, education system in India also mandates 25% reservations to marginal section of the society (Chhokar, 2010). In 2018–2019, India ranked 62nd in total public expenditure on education and spent 305.28 billion USD on education (3% of total GDP). While, India the fastest-growing major economy in the world has the largest young population in the world. It is interesting to note that the unemployment rate in India is around 11% in 2019 and more than 30% of this unemployed population constitutes bachelors and masters degree holders in the country (KPMG, 2019). The quality of life and development of a country is determined by the quality of education.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been introduced by the Government of India (GOI) to transform the education ecosystem in

India. The relevance and the need of the new education policy could be gauged from the fact that this is India's first education policy in the 21st century and overall third policy since India got independence in 1947. Prior two education policies were introduced in the year 1968 and 1986. The last revision in the education policy 34 year ago primarily focused on primary education system in India through the "operation blackboard" (Colclough & De, 2010; Pandey, 2019). However, as we all know technology has taken massive strides and education should move to address the challenges of society, economy and the country at large with respect to technology. Thus, the new education policy aimed at holistic, multidisciplinary and skill-oriented education system for the future generation in India is imperative. The NEP 2020 is touted as the major step in the direction to make India a global knowledge center. It provides a comprehensive framework to revamp Indian education in terms of accessibility, equity and quality in education system. This policy also attempts to align Indian education system with the global sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 of 2030 United Nations agenda for SD. The GOI has committed to increase spending up to 6% of GDP as public expenditure on education. This paper offers insights on the alignment of NEP 2020 with the 2030 agenda of SD. It also attempts to answer the broader question that how NEP 2020 is going to transform the education system in India in the light of key takeaways from the policy and the challenges that lie ahead in the implementation of NEP 2020.

2 | ALIGNING INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH THE QUALITY EDUCATION GOAL (SDG 4) OF UN AGENDA FOR SD

India has tied itself to United Nations 2030 agenda for SD with the 17 SDGs. The fourth goal of SDGs, "Quality Education" aims to impart inclusive high-quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by the year 2030. For a large and diverse country like India, a linear approach could no longer be a solution to develop quality education system and it needs to implement sustainable solutions through technology & innovation in education for larger societal realization (Pandey, 2019). In this direction, the NEP 2020 provides an overarching framework to contextualize SDG 4 in the context of India. In line with the principles of SDGs 2030, this new policy is based on the five underlying determinants namely affordability, quality, access, equity and accountability. The policy has been strategized to rejig the entire education ecosystem in India to achieve critical targets under SDG 4 through structural reforms for inclusive and quality learning. This includes education in local language, socially cohesive environment at schools, special focus to socially & economically disadvantaged regions & groups such as tribal communities, transgender children, economically backward communities. Majority of targets under SDG 4 emphasize on high-quality learning. To achieve quality education SDG, the policy also propagates the implementation of new pedagogical techniques to enhance student engagement and teaching-learning effectiveness. The issue of gender inclusion fund (GIF) has been provisioned to achieve the target of access to quality preprimary education

which is in sync with SDG 4.2. Similarly, National Education Technology Forum (NETF) has been proposed to impart vocational and technical skills to young children as early as sixth standard. It will help to achieve SDG 4.3 target about the promotion of vocational and technical education. The target of enhanced relevant skills in people for financial success is addressed in SDG 4.4. Major thrust has been provided to increase the enrollment ratio in higher education to achieve this target. Moreover, internationalization of higher education and the concept of the academic bank of credit has been introduced to ensure seamless quality education across the globe. To achieve non-discrimination in education which is aligned with SDG 4.5, the new education paradigm of internet-based e-learning has been introduced through impetus on capacity building and digital infrastructure. National Foundation of Literacy and Numeracy (NFLN) has been advocated to ensure numeracy and literacy skills by third grade to align with the SDG 4.6 for universal literacy and numeracy.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes on key parameters of quality education such as better enrollment in higher education, teaching-learning outcome and skills-oriented education to the youth. It provides a comprehensive framework to measure the impact of improvement in teaching-learning outcome. It includes major interventions to improve India's performance across key indicators of SDG 4 like adult literacy rate, gender parity index in elementary, secondary & higher education, unemployment rate and gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education in India (MyGov, 2020). It aims to achieve 100% gross enrollment in elementary and secondary school education in India by 2030. The complete revamp of education system in India through NEP 2020 will help India to achieve targets of SDGs.

3 | MAJOR INTERVENTIONS

The new NEP 2020 introduced several significant reforms to revamp the existing education system in India. In a major shift, world's top universities will now be allowed to establish campuses and operate in India. The Ministry of Human Resource & Development has been renamed as Ministry of Education in India. This adds a direct focus to education rather than the next step of human resource development. Special education zone (SEZ) and GIF has been provisioned to provide quality education to the disadvantaged sections and regions of the country. Dissolving the existing University Grant Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) under a single umbrella regulator will be established for the accreditation and academic regulation of higher education institutions in India. The "10 + 2" school education structure is replaced with a new design of "5 + 3 + 4 + 4" corresponding to age groups of 3–8 years for foundational stage, 8–11 years for preparatory stage, 11–14 years for middle and 14–18 for secondary stage respectively. This ensures that learners get attached to hands on learning just from the ninth year (after 5 + 3) of their education (MHRD, 2020). India has suffered a lot in the last few decades due to child labor laws. Children below the age of 14 years were not allowed to work as per the child labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act 1986. Education, as one knows is

development of the acumen to think, express and create and not only literacy. Thinking develops if one is cast from formative years. Many skilled jobs were lost due to misinterpretation between learning and child labor. This killed the skills of many craftsmen in the making. Children would work only after the age of 14, by which age it was difficult to make them learn the craft. India suffered from this in industries like the handicrafts and textiles industries. Today tailors in India often repent that they cannot teach their children how to stitch as the children are not allowed in the workshops. Under the new education policy after 8 years of education, learners can use the policy and become apprentices to learn skills along with their educational stream. The same is the case with coding where students who are interested in coding can now advance their skills in class 6 onwards itself and they do not have to wait till their bachelors degree is complete.

For a unified delivery, a single National Test Agency (NTA) has been strategized to conduct the admission test across all central universities. Academic bank of credits for the students will be created to transfer students' education credits as a system of progression rather than competition. Vocational education will now start from class sixth in the form of internship to impart skills. A 360° holistic performance card for students is introduced to improve the quality of teaching-learning outcome. National Research Foundation is promulgated for unified directions and promotion of research and innovation in higher education in India. Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) will be created on the lines of premium institutions like the IITs & IIMs of India to provide best multidisciplinary education with state of the art requirements. Under the new policy, the bachelors education is a step up delivery. It has 4 years of multidisciplinary undergraduate program with multiple exit and entry options. The step intends to make the student accommodate to various environment scenarios. First year's education is a certificate education, a diploma in the second year and bachelor's degree after completion of 3 years. The fourth year has been dedicated to research. The student will progress to masters degree which will only be for 1 year rather than the 2 year degree as of now. Such an education will give the power to the student to apply his knowledge as and when fit. Entry and exit at different levels create a good combination of education and application as interwoven cycles here. The student can exit and join the industry and return to get the education. Such a combination also eliminates the requirement of entering the industry after a 3 year bachelors degree. In fact, the learner is always open to apply the knowledge received. The public investment on education has been raised to 6% of the total GDP with the targets to achieve 100% GER in secondary education and 50% GER in higher education by 2035.

4 | CHALLENGES

India stands 62nd in public expenditure per student in the world with many substandard educational institutions. Countries like US and China stand ahead of India but small countries like Bhutan, Korea and Kenya also stand up as better performers. Kothari Commission in India had recommended allocation of 6% of GDP way back in 1964.

India could assign this target in 2020 under the new education policy. This large gap has made India deficient in terms of educational adjustment leading to international gaps in innovations and job allocations. A most interesting case is that of China which around 30 years back was a country considered to be adept with Mandarin and was rigid in adopting English language. Then, it was considered to be a country with difficulty in adapting to the latest innovations emerging across the world. Indian faculty members were more in number in US and other developed countries at that point in time. Today the case is different and large numbers of Chinese are serving in the referred countries. China could easily identify that it is not only the allocation of high proportion of GDP toward education but also tuning its own system toward international innovations. China worked at two levels, one introduction & adoption of the English language and second keeping its own country innovate in Mandarin and practice the same. This gave rise to a robust production system unmatched to any other in the world and the world looks up to China for their current needs and requirements.

In case of India the aspiration for achieving the target of 50% enrollment in higher education by the year 2035, it is very long time considering advancements in artificial intelligence and other computer applications. We might witness that the structure of education becomes redundant and higher education does not appear as a segment of education. Instead, the education will be delivered on specialization basis and applications become the driver of education. This observation appears in the face of fast-changing business applications across the value chain. The workforce may be required for industrial development much sooner than the finish of education. What could be added to the component of education is technical education on the go. Emphasis on the same has not been indicated but may evolve from the interest of educational institutions. Education for applications is the norm of the times. Education for applications implies imparting education for specific jobs and purposes so that individual is trained for a specific job rather than making him a specialist of the stream.

India is looked like a market by other countries whereas the notion within India is that it serves the world with specialists for various tasks. One of the biggest challenges would be pulling out specialists who will have to counter the might of AI and allied technological advancements. India surely suffers from a capital deficiency for preparation of education. Another challenge that India will face is the challenge of restructuring the current educational setup. India has government institutions and private institutions providing education. The government institutions too fall under two categories of central government-funded and state government-funded institutions. The large gap between the funding of the two setups is very loud and is fairly exhibited in their achievements. The central government institutions exhibit a higher level of achievement and are very highly recognized by the Indian population as center of excellence in contrast to the state government institutions at large. Thereafter India has a tier of private institutions which in most of the cases appear to be nonperformers. This could be attributed to poor governance. The private educational setups have mushroomed and most of the promoters of

such institutions are the ones who have the basic intent of investing rather than the mission of making an educated globe. They look at education as an industry where institutions can compete with others. This segment is interested more in the operation of the educational institution as a business entity. The rising Indian middle class has been hungry for education and wants a certificate more than anything leading to enough admissions to make such institutions prosper. More importantly, what is required for the education policy is fine-tune governance rather than just concentrate on changing the structure of the education system. Better governance can fuel the rocket of education in the right direction with good velocity.

The Indian education system will also have to face the challenge of admitting through the national testing agency which is a structure admitting students of all streams. This appears to be a good unified structure but each and every stream has its own specialities that led to the creation of specified admission agencies. The administrative governance can be cared for through this structure but academic excellence may have to face a contrast.

The new education policy rests on a teaching system of 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 which augurs well with regular interchanging subjects. This multientry and exit of options to students will create an understanding of allied streams and interests. In streams such as medicine, engineering and allied areas where education takes long to create specialists, the education policy will have to consider how to evolve such specialists. It is very well thought of to create an education medium in the mother language of the student as the student will be more adept in the same language hence can understand the nuances of the subject much easily. The general criticism is how the student will face the challenge of learning at a later stage as the education system is adapted to English as a medium of learning and most of the study material is available in English.

In recent times, that is the COVID-19 crisis duration has witnessed movement from classroom teaching, to teaching through various modes of internet communication, remaining in the confines of home. Most of the international content available is in English, in comparison to regional languages. Despite Hindi being one of the official and most widely used language in majority of the states in India, it is difficult to find content in Hindi for specialized subjects of education. The general understanding is that various online software can easily translate most of the contents from one language to another but we witness that during translation most of the times the intent of the reason in the original form is lost during translation.

The recruitment of teachers today is for a period up to retirement (age of 60 years). Challenge of today's education is up-gradation of educational setup to the levels of innovation for requirements according to the latest needs. The requirement is in imbibing training to teachers for multitasking and multimodal teaching with a fast change from one stream to another. Education policy hence requires a deep-rooted policy at the existing workforce to make the essence of the new education policy from theory to practice. The challenge emerges from a private institutional setup where teachers are considered more as class delivery mechanisms rather than innovators. The payment made to teachers is quite meager and they have to survive in

a multiperforming environment with lesser academics and more of administration. The private institutions have admission as drivers of their existence and this is reflected in their teachers working. This workforce hence has also to be upgraded for the new education policy.

Another challenge emerges from the entry of foreign institutions. The NEP is inviting institutions of eminence to complement education but that is also a challenge for the current setup of the country. In fact, many of the institutions will perish due to new institutions from the other parts of the world. An international educational institution with a multicourse delivery and top of the line appeal entering into India will create an interest of the Indians to join these institutions. The challenge in case of unstructured curriculum will be submitting oneself to the designs of foreign institutions leading to training of students for their needs and requirements whether in India or outside. The policy envisaged 6% of total GDP as public expenditure on education together by the union and state governments. However, the state government is entirely dependent on the union government for revenue mobilization sources and policy directives. The onus must be on union government to increase the public expenditure on education in India.

5 | CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy 2020 is a right step to construct Indians for a leap into tomorrow. The current policy required a change from a stream-based educational setup to a multimodal setup for structuring a global value adder. The policy changes look at how to make the system attuned to multimodal system but on the other the challenges appear in the form of how to accomplish a system which finally shapeup students in a competing environment. It address the need of robust solutions for India's problems incongruence with the other mega programs of GOI like Make in India, Start-up India, Skill India and Self reliant (Atma-Nirbhar) India. Facets of the national importance touching society and culture have been considered while developing this policy like regional adaptation and higher education for half of the populace but they have to be constructed delicately to evolve as individuals who can stand up the competition at the global level. Overall, this new NEP 2020 make good on the longstanding reforms in the Indian education system. It also provides the much needed structural institutional changes that are perfectly in harmony with the government nation-building mega programs and SDGs targets. But the holistic education for the future nation's stakeholders will depend upon how both union and state government will address substantial implementation challenges.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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