

Fine-tuning the education policy

Details about financing and institutional structures must be fleshed out



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After about four years in the making, the draft National Education Policy, 2019 is out in the public domain, with comments sought from all stakeholders till June 30. Drawing inputs from the T.S.R. Subramanian Committee report and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the K. Kasturirangan Committee has produced a document that is comprehensive, far-sighted and grounded in realities.

The idea that lifelong education is based on four pillars – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be – has inspired the committee to cover every aspect of the education sector: school, higher, vocational and adult education. It also includes the whole gamut of professional education – engineering, medicine, agriculture, law, etc. It explains the scientific rationale behind the policy's prescriptions and suggests how the proposals can be translated into practice at the State and Central levels.

Unique features of the policy

The draft policy seeks to revamp all aspects of the sector and does not shy away from suggesting brave new ideas.

In school education, one such idea is to cover children of 3-18 years [instead of the present 6-14 years under the Right to Education (RTE) Act], three years under early childhood care and education (ECCE) and four years under secondary education. Based on evidence from neuroscience that over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of six and that 'school preparedness' at Anganwadis is light on educational aspects, ECCE would facilitate play and discovery-based learning for children of that age group.

Another innovative idea is to achieve 'universal foundational literacy and numeracy' through initiatives like the National Tutors Programme and the Remedial Instructional Aides Programme. Introduction of school complexes, a system of modular Board Examinations to allow flexibility, setting up Special Education Zones in disadvantaged regions, recognising teachers at the heart

of the system, moving teacher education into the university system, and stressing the importance of learning new languages are among the key recommendations.

The way ahead for higher education has also been marked by bold propositions. The aim is to double the Gross Enrolment Ratio from 25% to 50% by 2035 and make universities the hubs of research (with Tier 1 universities/institutions devoted primarily to research and some teaching, Tier 2 universities devoted to teaching and some research, and Tier 3 institutions comprising mainly colleges that are to be converted gradually into degree-giving autonomous institutions). The policy recognises the crucial importance of liberal arts (it recommends setting up five Indian Institutes of Liberal Arts offering four-year courses) and the study of modern and classical languages (it recommends setting up National Institutions for Pali, Prakrit and Persian). It proposes separate institutions for regulation, funding, standard setting and accreditation, a National Research Foundation, and a Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog/ National Education Commission. Interestingly, vocational education, meant for 50% of the students, is sought to be integrated with school and higher education.

Challenges in implementation

These are progressive ideas, but there are roadblocks in their implementation. These mostly relate to funding requirements and governance architecture.

First, what is recommended is a doubling of public funding to 6% of the GDP and increasing overall public expenditure on education to 20% from the current 10%. This is desirable but does not appear to be feasible in the near future given that most of the additional funding has to come from the States.

Though innovative financing schemes have been proposed, involving the private sector, how those schemes will shape up remains to be seen.

Second, while establishing new institutions for Pali, Prakrit and Persian appears to be a novel idea, shouldn't the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysuru be strengthened and perhaps even upgraded to a university with an extended mandate to take care of these languages?

Third, expanding coverage under the RTE Act to include pre-school children is extremely important, but should perhaps be introduced gradually, keeping in mind the quality of infrastructure and teacher vacancies. Amendment of the Act can perhaps wait for a while.

Fourth, the idea of setting up the Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog under the Prime Minister and having it serviced by the MHRD is crucial in order to integrate the approaches and programmes of multiple departments. However, it is fraught with many administrative problems and possible turf battles. Bringing medical or agricultural or legal education under one umbrella is likely to be met with stiff opposition. What is going to happen, for example, to the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017?

Fifth, the idea of regulation being brought under the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority, standard setting under the General Education Council and funding under the Higher Education Grants Council may require a revisit so that there is synchronisation with the current Bill for the Higher Education Commission of India. Besides, the draft policy is silent on the Institutions of Eminence and agencies like the Higher Education Funding Agency.

Last, language issues have to be handled sensitively in view of their emotional overtones, as witnessed recently. Protests are often made without understanding the spirit of the text.

The details about financing and institutional structures should be fleshed out at the earliest, perhaps by an inter-departmental committee under the Cabinet Secretary. It is time for all conscientious persons to study the report and suggest the best path forward. If the political leadership backs it, implementation of the policy will transform our nation.

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For more inclusive private schools

Suggestions for better implementation of the Right to Education Act



'AMERICAI' V. NARAYANAN & KAVAYA NARAYANAN



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In India, the right to education was made a fundamental right by inserting Article 21A by the Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002. It was enabled with the subsequent enactment of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. However, its implementation has been a challenge for most States as they have discretion in how the Act gets implemented. Thus, as the new academic year dawns upon us again, a slew of queries and complications related to various provisions of the RTE Act need to be addressed.

No child left behind

The RTE Act bears many similarities to the U.S.'s No Child Left Behind Act, including school accountability, assessment standards and teacher training. Like the U.S., in India too States have been given major leeway in deciding the course of implementation. However, a problem that recurs every year is mandated access to underprivileged sections of society. Section 12 (1) (c) of the Act mandates all private schools (except for minority schools) to allocate 25% of their seats to economically weaker sections, i.e. those families with an income of less than ₹2 lakh a year, and other disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the physically challenged. The State government will then reimburse these schools for students admitted under this provision, at an amount per month that is determined by the State rules.

The process for admission under Section 12 (1) (c) is far from perfect. This is evident in the large number of vacancies in several cities in the country. For instance, on the last day of admissions under the RTE Act, under the first lottery there were 20,835 vacancies in Maharashtra.

Tamil Nadu, which has always been at the forefront of educational progress in India, has made certain strides in the implementation of Section 12 (1) (c). It has widened the ambit of "disadvantaged sections" to include HIV positive children and transgenders. A central

spacious public announcements regarding this.

There have also been several grievances regarding the '1 km radius' criterion, especially for rural residents who may not have any private schools in their vicinity. This criterion will eventually widen the rural-urban divide in educational outcomes. The Kerala Rules are more progressive as they acknowledge terrain limitations and the State has made provisions for adequate arrangements for providing elementary education.

Need for inclusion

The window for the admission process for RTE Act vacancies in private schools is very narrow. This causes many parents to miss the deadline, despite thousands of vacancies. The procedure for admission should be made through a single-point window online for all school boards, with computer kiosks to assist parents who may not be able to fill the form online. A mobile application should be built with live information on the number of seats available in each school under the 25% quota. An RTE compliance audit should be conducted for all schools every year by the State Education Department. Any aid given to private schools must be tied to the levels of compliance achieved by the school. Several schools do not adhere to the 25% quota. These schools should be penalised and derecognised if continuous violations occur. Every school should declare prominently that it is RTE compliant – and the admission procedure, including deadlines, should be conspicuously displayed at the school premises. On the government side of things, funds need to be released in a timely manner, so that it inspires confidence in schools to fill all the vacancies.

Section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act recognises the need for inclusion, and explicitly establishes responsibility on all stakeholders to contribute towards this goal. Consequently, private schools, which often become islands of the privileged class, will now become more inclusive. This socialisation will benefit all classes of society as we rise above our social biases to make our children not just better learners but better human beings.

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SINGLE FILE

Making science accessible

We need to rethink how we organise scientific knowledge

MANU RAJAN



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The ability to self-correct is considered a hallmark of science. Journals publish material that advances a field in new ways. Studies that yield negative or non-confirmatory results of previous findings do not get priority, leading to insufficient replication of results. The peer-review process

for ensuring quality can also be marred by the personal interests of the reviewers. The dissemination of scientific findings has retained this basic form even after moving online.

We need to rethink how we organise scientific knowledge and whether it should continue to be structured in journal form. Research has become almost inaccessible to ordinary citizens due to subscription fees. Academic publishing must embrace a more democratic, dynamic and collaborative process. While the different variants of the newer open access model aim to distribute published research online and free of cost to the reader, the fees for publication is often met by the author, the employer, or through a research grant. To increase profits, publishers sometimes compromise on quality and accept undeserving articles.

Under the OpenWetWare project of MIT, 20 labs in different institutions around the world use a wiki-based site to share data, materials and equipment. The ground-breaking work on the twin primes conjecture was done primarily in a comment thread via the Polymath Project.

The procedure of citations in a traditional journal paper accords them the same status irrespective of whether their results are presumed, strengthened or challenged. A new model would let us know with a click whether ideas are likely to become redundant or are truly load-bearing. Rapid, collaborative and iterative processes can improve veracity of scientific knowledge through large-scale participation.

Max Planck once observed that revolutions in science must sometimes wait for funerals. Though democratic initiatives such as Hackathons are gaining ground, our research institutions are still wedded to the antiquated journal system. Even the few digital institutional repositories that exist are centred on journal papers; other assets potentially generated in-house such as lessons learned from projects could also be included. At the institutional level, researchers continue to be recognised primarily for the number of papers they publish and the citations these papers can garner.

Individualism and secrecy get rewarded; there is no incentive for knowledge sharing. The need for wider collaboration between different constituencies of knowledge production and dissemination has policy implications at the macro level as well. Instead of chasing the mirage of high global rankings of a few isolated institutes of excellence, should a democratic society's priorities not be to figure out ways to encourage knowledge creation and sharing across different levels of society?

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DATA POINT

Voting pattern

A comparison of phase-wise vote shares of the BJP and the Congress in the 2019 Lok Sabha election shows that the BJP's contested vote share remained above 48% except during the first phase, while the Congress's share consistently hovered around 20-30%. Although the BJP contested in a substantial number of seats in the first two phases, its overall vote share was significantly lower compared to its performance in the other phases, since it fared poorly in most of south India. It polled over half of the total votes in the fifth phase conducted on May 12. By **The Hindu Data Team**

Phase	Total Seats	Seats contested by BJP	Seats contested by Congress	Contested vote share of BJP (%)	Contested vote share of Congress (%)	Overall vote share of BJP (%)	Overall vote share of Congress (%)
1	91	83	83	25.94	18.71	23.62	17.25
2	95	50	53	48.14	32.36	25.84	18.53
3	117	99	92	48.21	31.72	40.53	24.92
4	71	59	57	52.47	22.97	44.69	18.41
5	50	47	44	53.96	21.72	50.86	19.34
6	59	54	46	52.72	19.49	48.71	15.56
7	59	44	46	49.96	23.97	37.87	19.38

- In A.P. and Telangana, which went to polls in the first phase, the BJP's contested vote share was 1% and 19.45%, respectively. YSRCP and TRS polled the most votes in those States

- In the fourth phase, despite receiving only 17% of the contested votes in Kerala, the BJP garnered over 40% of the overall votes due to its dominance in Gujarat, Maharashtra & northern U.P.

- In the second phase, the BJP performed marginally better. But it put up a poor show in T.N. where its contested vote share was 28.52%. The DMK dominated in the State

- In the third phase, the Congress polled close to 25% of the overall votes, its highest among all phases. The party's vote share failed to go above 20% in the other phases

Comparison with 2014

The BJP's highest vote share was in Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand. In these States it improved its 2014 performance. Its lowest vote share was in Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh and Lakshwadeep

State	BJP's 2014 overall vote %	BJP's 2019 overall vote %
Himachal Pradesh	53.85	69.11
Gujarat	60.11	62.21
Uttarakhand	55.93	61.01
Sikkim	2.39	4.71
Andhra Pradesh	8.52	1.0
Lakshwadeep	0.43	0.27

Major States and number of seats which went to polls:
Phase 1 A.P. (25), Telangana (17), U.P. (8), Maharashtra (7),
Phase 2 T.N. (38), Karnataka (14), Maharashtra (10), U.P. (8)
Phase 3 Gujarat (26), Kerala (20), Maharashtra (14), U.P. (10)
Phase 4 Maharashtra (17), Rajasthan (13), U.P. (13), M.P. (6), W.B. (8)
Phase 5 U.P. (14), Rajasthan (12), M.P. (7)
Phase 6 U.P. (14), Haryana (10), M.P. (8), Delhi (7), W.B. (8)
Phase 7 Punjab (13), U.P. (13), M.P. (8), W.B. (9)

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 5, 1969

No Hindi in govt. or aided schools in Tamil Nadu

The Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, said here [Madras] today [June 4] that Hindi should not be taught in any form in Government and aided schools in the State, although "minority" schools and Central schools might teach it as the main language or use it as the medium of instruction. He told reporters that if the Government allowed teaching of Hindi as the alternative main language in schools, it would amount to reviving it. Mr. S. Madhavan, Education Minister, who was also present when Pressmen met the Chief Minister, said it would be "dangerous" to allow Hindi to be taught in schools as the main language. A reporter pointed out that in many high schools Hindi was being taught as the main language to students in the English medium sections. "If that had been so, it was wrong", Mr. Madhavan remarked. The Education Minister's attention was drawn to a circular issued by a Tambaram school asking parents to take away their wards who were studying Hindi as the main language, since the Director of School Education had ordered that Hindi should not be taught in the school. Mr. Madhavan denied that any new orders had been issued by the Department. He, however, reiterated that the policy of the Government was to have only English and Tamil taught in schools.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 5, 1919.

The Reforms Despatch.

The Indian Association of Calcutta has issued [in Calcutta] a lengthy statement expressing its opinion on the Despatch of the Government of India of the 5th of March. The Association says that the Government of India failed most signally in its duty. The outer framework of the scheme of the Joint Report has been preserved but the Government have made recommendations which strike at its very root and alter it beyond recognition. The Association fails to discover any trace of responsible government or anything approaching to responsible Government in their recommendation.

CONCEPTUAL Disruptive innovation

BUSINESS

This refers to any innovation that creates a market for a new product that disrupts an established market that is already big in size. The birth of new technologies like the Internet and email, for instance, severely disrupted the traditional postal network that served a huge market. The term was popularised by American business scholar Clayton Christensen in his 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma* although it was first proposed in academic circles much earlier.

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