

# AN EDUCATION POLICY THAT IS SWEEPING IN ITS VISION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

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In approving the [National Education Policy 2020](#) on July 29, the Union Cabinet has taken an important step forward in India's transition from deprivation to development. It marks the fourth major policy initiative in education since Independence. The last one was undertaken a good 34 years ago and modified in 1992. Given our current demographic profile, the stage of development we are in, and the aspirations of our youth, the new policy has not come a day too soon.

Based on two committee reports and extensive nationwide consultations, NEP 2020 is sweeping in its vision and seeks to address the entire gamut of education from preschool to doctoral studies, and from professional degrees to vocational training. It acknowledges the 21st century need for mobility, flexibility, alternate pathways to learning, and self-actualisation.

National Education Policy 2020 | [Leave no child behind, bridge digital divide](#)

India has faced unprecedented challenges in providing quality education to children and the youth. Lack of resources and capacity, dozens of mother tongues, a link language that despite being the global language of choice is alien to most, and a persistent mismatch between the knowledge and skills imparted and the jobs available have been some of the challenges that have bedeviled our efforts since Independence.

The 2020 policy attempts to break free from the shackles of the past. In adopting a 5+3+3+4 model for school education starting at age 3, it recognises the primacy of the formative years from ages 3 to 8 in shaping the child's future. It also recognises the importance of learning in the child's mother tongue till at least Class 5. Here, we are up against the strong desire of parents today, born of pragmatism, to give a head start to their children by exposing them to English from day one. Maybe we should recognise that between ages 3 and 8, picking up languages is child's play, and blend the mother tongue and English in the first five years of school. Multilingual felicity could become the USP of the educated Indian.

Another key aspect of school education in the new policy is the breaking of the straitjackets of arts, commerce and science streams in high school, and the laudable goal of introducing vocational courses with internship. How exactly this will be realised is to be worked out, given the penchant of overzealous parents to "stream" their children into professions at the earliest. The 'blue-collarisation' of vocations in our society is also a hurdle to be overcome, but this need not deter us from recognising the merits of the proposed policy. Needless to say, the policy envisages 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education by 2030.

Editorial | [A long road: On National Education Policy 2020](#)

In keeping with the philosophy of flexibility in enabling our students to deviate from the straight and narrow, NEP 2020 proposes a multi-disciplinary higher education framework with portable credits, and multiple exits with certificates, diplomas and degrees. An ambitious GER of 50% is envisaged by 2035. At the apex will be Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities, where research will be supported by a new National Research Foundation. The role of our

colleges in attaining the ambitious GER target is recognised by empowering them as autonomous degree-granting institutions, and phasing out the affiliated college, a unique Indian beast that is neither fish nor fowl. The huge potential of online pedagogy and learning methodologies for attaining the GER target is recognised and sought to be tapped extensively.

Regulatory cholesterol is the bane of governance in India, with poor outcomes to boot. NEP 2020 makes a bold prescription to free our schools, colleges and universities from periodic “inspections” and place them on the path of self-assessment and voluntary declaration. Transparency, maintaining quality standards and a favourable public perception will become a 24X7 pursuit for the institutions, leading to all-round improvement in their standard. A single, lean body with four verticals for standards-setting, funding, accreditation and regulation is proposed to provide “light but tight” oversight.

In a country still beset by huge inequality and challenges faced by the disadvantaged and disabled, the NEP lays particular emphasis on providing adequate support to ensure that no child is deprived of education, and every challenged child is provided the special support she needs. The long-neglected ancient Indian languages and Indic knowledge systems are also identified for immediate attention. All this requires enormous resources. An ambitious target of public spending at 6% of GDP has been set. This is certainly a tall order, given the current tax-to-GDP ratio and competing claims on the national exchequer of healthcare, national security and other key sectors. However, resources are never the main roadblock to success in education. If public and political will can be mustered, resources will find their way from both public and private sources. NEP 2020 provides the ingredients and the right recipe. What we make of it depends entirely on us.

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