

ON EDUCATION, A POSITIVE BLUEPRINT - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

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

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The Union Cabinet on Wednesday passed the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which aims at making the education system holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned to the needs of the 21st century and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The policy is ambitious and forward-looking. In school education, which has seen high enrolment but low learning levels, the policy has some first-rate aims to change the existing scenario — ensuring universal access to school education from pre-school to secondary; focusing on early childhood care, education, foundational literacy and numeracy; reintegrating dropouts; restructuring curriculum and pedagogy; reforming assessments and exams; and investing in teacher training and broad-basing their appraisal. Most crucially, NEP, once and for all, buries the strident Hindi versus English language debate; instead, it emphasises on making mother tongue, local language or the regional language the medium of instruction at least till Grade 5, which is considered the best medium of teaching. There is some ambiguity, which prompted concerns whether this would be at the cost of English language education, but the government has clarified that this is not mandatory. There is also an emphasis on vocational training, but to make it effective, there has to be close coordination between the education and skills ministry.

In the higher education segment, NEP aims to improve the Gross Enrolment Ratio from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035; break disciplinary barriers; establish academic credit bank, and allow Indian institutions to build campuses abroad and pave the way for foreign universities to come to India. While these are noble goals, increasing GER drastically — almost adding the same number of seats that India has had in the last 70 years in the next 15 years — may lead to a focus on quantity rather than quality. The new policy also talks about creating several regulatory bodies. This is a sound idea; but to make these institutions successful, it is imperative that they are built better, and staffed with people who have the vision to implement the policy mandate.

While NEP aims to increase public investment in education from the current 4.3% to 6% of GDP, there is no time-frame given. The need to enhance funding was first recognised decades ago. Only increasing the investment, however, will not be a panacea; to improve the quality of education, there has to be realistic budgeting, flexibility in the tweaking of priorities when required; strong leadership; and a singular focus on outcomes. Many experts feel that while NEP

talks of social inequalities at length, its political and economic goals are diffused. It is now important for the government to get state governments on board, and allow a full-fledged discussion in Parliament on the policy.

END

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