Perspectives on National Education Policy

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School Education in India and the National Education Policy 2020: An Overview

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is the first education policy of the 21ˢᵗ century. It focuses on imparting education that will prepare the students for lifelong learning. Universalisation of school education by 2030 is one target undertaken to facilitate Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 simultaneously. Part I of the Policy document focuses on school education and here eight thrust areas have been identified. Integration of the early childhood care and education with the mainstream schooling is a vital recommendation. It extends the scope of constitutional commitment to universal education for the 6–14 age group (Right to Education Act 2009) to 3–18 age group. Also, the focus on standard setting in school education is a redeeming feature of the Policy. But the timing of announcement of the NEP in the COVID-19 pandemic situation is premature. Again the constraints long obstructing the reform initiatives in school education of India have not been identified for policy address.

Introduction

On 29ᵗʰ July 2020 the Union Cabinet of Ministers approved the National Education Policy 2020 (henceforth NEP 2020)[1]and the 66-page policy document was released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. That was the time when India was entering a rising phase of COVID 2019 cases. The date 29ᵗʰ July was the successive sixth day that witnessed daily new cases exceeding 45,000 and the everyday tremors of the ongoing "unlockdown" process made the average public psychology shaky and indifferent to other issues. Admittedly because of the pandemic situation unlike its predecessor National Policy on Education 1986 (NPE 1986) and the subsequent Programme of Action 1992 (POA 1992), the NEP 2020 [MHRD (2020)] could not be tabled in the lower and upper Houses of the Parliament for the desirable debate and

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[1]National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India. Retrieved from: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdfindex.php

discourse that could create a country-wide awareness about the problems and challenges of the Indian education sector. However, the massive 484-page Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) submitted in 2019 [MHRD (2019)] by a panel headed by former ISRO Chairman Dr. Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan, was placed in the public domain for quite some time for feedback and suggestions. The state governments were invited to share their suggestions. But these public and official consultations, however rigorous they might be, cannot obliterate the lacuna of missing public debate desirable in a democratic pluralistic socio-cultural milieu unique to India. More importantly, the brighter aspects of the NEP 2020 may miss serious attention and discussion of the stakeholders rendering them unprepared for meaningful participation in the implementation process. Indeed an appraisal of the NEP 2020 will remain incomplete till a detailed Programme of Action is announced.

Policy Apathy towards School Education: Missed Opportunities of Globalisation

Historically India's education policy programmes have shown limited originality and little understanding of the dynamics of ground realities. As far back as in 1970, Amartya Sen in the Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lectures[2] observed that the contrast between our attention to higher education and neglect of elementary education had seemed intolerably large. He argued that there were deep seated class biases in the pressures that determined the Indian educational priorities and that inequalities in education were indeed a reflection of the inequalities in economic and social powers. Again in 1994 Amartya Sen in the First Lakdawala Memorial Lecture[3] explained how the continuity in this Nehruvian gap between attention to higher education vis-à-vis elementary education for decades after independence left India's labour force with little school education and little adaptability to new technologies. This policy apathy caught India unprepared to participate in the growing globalized markets that started to emerge from the 1970s. In contrast, the East Asian Tigers that experienced unprecedented export-led growth followed by China in the growth march from the late 1970s, could successfully set up a broad-based quality secondary education system because of which the average skill adaptation ability of their workers was much higher. Sen exclaimed, "…. it is extraordinary how little we have progressed in basic education." In this 1994

[2]Sen, A. K. (1970). "The Crisis in Indian Education" (The Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lectures), *Training Division, Department of Personnel, Cabinet Secretariat, New Delhi.* Retrieved from: https://dspace.gipe.ac.in/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10973/45300/GIPE-139918.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

[3]Sen, A. K. (1994). "Beyond Liberalisation: Social Opportunity and Human Capability" (The first D.T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture), *Institute of Social Sciences,* New Delhi. pp. 30. Paperback.index.php

lecture there was no mention of the New Policy of Education 1986 and the subsequent Programme of Action 1992 perhaps because notwithstanding the announcements, little activism at the ground level was visible.

Indeed active state intervention in the school education of India started with the announcement of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the year 2001-02. Unfortunately, the impetus was not truly indigenous.

International Commitments Providing Impetus to School Education: The Background of the NEP 2020

A proactive phase of developmental public intervention in school education was visible at the turn of the millennium when the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was announced by the Union Government in 2001-02. In retrospect it appears that the impetus was motivated more by India's formal subscription to the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG)[4] and the availability of substantial funding as soft loan from the World Bank for the purpose. It is pertinent to recall that the first two goals (MDGs) were respectively eradication of extreme poverty, hunger and achieving universal primary education with gender parity by the target year 2015. Unfortunately, independent India showcased for decades how persistent poverty and hunger

could minimise public demand for quality education and how supply of free education where available failed to inspire its productive use. It should not be denied that for the first time the SSA generated action-based initiatives in the sphere of school education with substantial flow of fund from the central and the state governments. This activism and funds flow naturally engaged public attention to school education as never before. School education became a rich area of research. For now, it is pertinent to refer to the analysis contained in the document UNESCAP (2015)[5], prepared by the UNESCAP on behalf of the United Nations Country Team – India. The study observes that India is off-track on the targets to realise MDG 2 – universal primary education with gender parity. Large numbers of children still remain out of school and fail to complete primary education. The quality of education is also a major concern. Direct testing of primary school students indicate poor learning in particular in language and mathematics. The study concludes that more attention is needed on regular assessment of teachers' performance and provision for incentives linked to improvement in students' learning may be made. The study has suggested the following short term and medium-term policy priorities that might facilitate universalisation of

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[4]United Nations, (July 1, 2015). The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

[5]United Nations ESCAP, (February, 2015). India and the MDGs: Towards a Sustainable Future for All. Retrieved from: https://www.unescap.org/resources/india-and-mdgs-towards-sustainable-future-all

primary education and subsequently secondary education with quality upgradation of outcomes:

Short term action areas include scaling up of efforts to reach the most excluded groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), among other vulnerable segments of populations, particularly in states that have fallen behind; providing instruction in the mother tongue of students; ensuring that children are enrolled at the official age of entry to primary school; encouraging early childhood education and improving accountability of teachers, and accordingly prioritize improvement of learning outcomes.

The medium term interventions suggested include stepping up resources to basic education, which remain low by international norms; supporting states with insufficient funds and improving efficiency in use of public resources; regular assessment of teachers' performance and providing them incentives linked to improvement in students' learning; increasing the teacher-pupil ratio in states, particularly in remote and disadvantaged areas and finally, efforts to encourage participation of non-public players, such as civil society and the private sector, parents and communities must be prioritized.

In the NEP 2020 there are reflections of the above suggestions. Meanwhile in 2015 India along with all other member states of the United Nations subscribed to the UN Declaration on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030[6]. This commitment perhaps played a role to begin the consultation process for the new National Education Policy for which a committee under the then Cabinet Secretary T. S. R. Subramanian was formed. The SDG 4 is concerned with education. The NEP 2020 has observed, "The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by India in 2015 – seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Such a lofty goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved."[7] Thus, global activism and global assessment have definitely played a role in shaping India's education policy-programmes including the NEP 2020.

The NEP 2020 and the Thrust Areas of School Education

Part I of the NEP 2020 deals with school education. The policy document has earmarked eight important areas for comprehensive intervention. Early

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[6]UNDP, (2015). Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Retrieved from: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html

[7]NEP 2020 document, p3

Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): Foundation of learning; Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An urgent and necessary prerequisite to Learning; Curtailing the Dropout Rates and Ensuring Universal access to Education at all levels; Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging; Teachers; Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All; Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance through School Complexes/Clusters and Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education.

Apart from the integration of part ECCE (for 3-6 year olds) with mainstream schooling and the last issue of standard setting, few new and novel ideas are to be found in the NEP 2020. This is not a shortcoming of the new policy declaration. Indeed, in our country the very fundamentals of education are not in right track in spite of excellent educational policy statements and various initiatives during the post-independence decades. Thus, the challenges in the education sector have hardly changed apart from becoming more complex in the background of a rapidly evolving educational scenario across the globe.

ECCE and the NEP 2020

The seminal feature of the NEP 2020 is the proposed structural shift in school education from the present 10 (Secondary) + 2 (Higher Secondary) structure to 5 (Foundational) +3 (Preparatory) +3 (Middle) +4 (Secondary) structure. To quote the Document, "This policy envisages that the extant 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18. In the new 5+3+3+4 structure, a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from age 3 is also included, which is aimed at promoting better overall learning, development, and well-being."[8]

The ECCE involves total development of the child, i.e. physical, motor, cognitive, language, emotional, social and moral. Presently, quality ECCE is not available to crores of children, particularly to children from socio-economically disadvantaged background. The NEP 2020 targets to achieve universal provisioning of quality early childhood development, care, and education within 2030 with an eye to ensure that all students entering Grade 1 will indeed be school ready. India will go a long way if this agenda on ECCE is supported by the Union and the state governments in letter and spirit.

However, the recognition of the instrumental role of ECCE in universalisation of quality primary education is not new. The National Policy on Education 1986 & the subsequent Programme of Action 1992 [MHRD (1992)][9] visualised a similar pivotal role of ECCE. In fact, ECCE is a part of the basket of services

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[8]NEP Document, p6

[9]https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/POA_1992.pdf

starting from care of mother during pregnancy, hygienic and skilled birth attendance, nutritional care of mother during lactation, correct infant feeding practices, immunization of infant from communicable diseases, mothers' education in child care, early childhood stimulation, and health and nutritional support throughout which are comprehensively called the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and are provided through the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). The ICDS programme started as long back as in 1975 subsequent to the announcement of the National Policy on Children in 1974. The purpose was to combat child hunger and malnutrition and nurture the cognitive capability at an early stage. The age span of children entitled to ICDS including ECCE is from conception to about 6 years from inception. The NPE 1986 charted out the following roadmap for ECCE - By 1990: A modest network of ECCE facilities to be set up in all tribal development blocks, blocks having substantial scheduled caste population and slums in large cities. For this a minimum of 2.50 lakh centres should be established; By 1995: ECCE to be expanded to a level of 10 lakh centres; By 2000: 20 lakh centres.

The lackadaisical progress towards fulfilling the above targets substantiate the persistent apathy and indifference of the people in power and in administration for the education and health of the crores of children from poor families.

The NEP 2020 has distinctly recognised the instrumental value of the ICDS including ECCE. However, it has rightly underscored the need to overhaul the early childhood education (ECE) which has received only scanty attention. Accordingly, the NEP 2020 has added a number of new dimensions to the ECE in the interest of achieving universal primary and secondary education by 2030: The segregation of the 3-6 age group of children from the 0-6 age group presently under the ICDS and integration of 3-6 age group in the mainstream schooling; Enhancement of state responsibility towards provision of universal schooling to children belonging to the 3-18 age bracket instead of the 6-14 age group under the Right to Education Act 2009 and accordingly the ECE has been contextualised to make all children "school ready."; The issue of extension of all other ICDS services to the children of 3-6 age group i.e. partial integration of the ICDS with school education is a good recommendation though a complex challenge; A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8 will be developed by NCERT in two parts, namely, a sub-framework for 0-3 year-olds, and a sub-framework for 3-8 year-olds. The framework will serve as a guide both for parents and for institutions engaged in early childhood care and education.

We have seen the NPE 1986 professed to set up 20 lakh centres by 2000 to facilitate ECCE but after twenty years since 2000, today we

have only 13.42 lakh functional Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). The miserable implementation of the ICDS programme has left India reeling with generations of children suffering from malnutrition and stunting which impacted the cognitive potential and learning ability. The NEP 2020 observes, "Anganwadis are currently quite deficient in supplies and infrastructure for education: as a result, they tend to contain more children in the 2-4 age range and fewer in the educationally critical 4-6 age range; they also have few teachers trained in or specially dedicated to early childhood education."[10]

The NEP 2020 professes that AWCs will be heavily built up to deal with the educational needs of children upto the age of 6 and workers trained in techniques of cognitive stimulation for infants and play-based and multilevel education for 3-6 year olds will be stationed across the country. The policy has emphasised that the colocation of AWCs and primary schools should be an important desideratum in the locational planning for new AWCs and primary schools and where existing AWCs and primary schools are not adequate to deliver quality ECE, high quality stand-alone pre-schools should be set up.

In absence of a clear-cut locational and resource mapping of the planned AWCs and a supportive financial scheme, an assessment of the ECCE as conceived in the NPE 2020 is

bound to have many open ends. Besides, the magnitude of the challenge has multiplied many times because of sharp rise in child malnutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. The history of ECCE and the unforeseen dislocations during the Covid months contradict many expectations around ECCE as proposed in the NEP 2020.

Poor Learning Outcome and the NEP 2020

Quite expectedly the NEP 2020 has addressed at length the vital issue of poor learning outcomes of Indian school education. It has accorded highest priority to universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools by the year 2025. To quote the NEP 2020, "The rest of this Policy will become relevant for our students only if this most basic learning requirement (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is first achieved."[11] It proposes the setting up of a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) at the earliest. The NEP 2020 mandates that all State/UT governments should prepare an implementation plan for attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools.

The miserable failure of the Indian schools to generate stage-specific learning outcomes is

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[10]NEP 2020, p7

[11]NEP document, p8

not a new concern. In 2004, the UPA government came into power with a promise of focusing on outcomes over outlays. The 2 per cent education cess was introduced in the same year. The thrust on enrolment in primary schools under the SSA produced good returns. By 2004, enrolment levels in primary school in India were already more than 90 per cent - the country was well on its way towards achieving universal primary enrolment. Then came the quality issue. Were the children actually learning? The government level impact studies were hardly done. In 2005 Pratham, an NGO working extensively on school education since 1996, decided to conduct a nationwide survey of children's ability to read simple texts and do arithmetic and it published the first Annual Status of Education Report (ASER).[12] The objective was to engage ordinary citizens to find out whether their children were learning. Since then, it has been painstakingly publishing the ASER every year. The ASERs have revealed the miserable learning outcomes of rural school children at primary and elementary levels for years upto 2020. No stringent remedial steps were taken by the successive governments. No spontaneous corrective measures were initiated by the teacher community. The civil society and the parents could not organize to demand introduction of

suitable checks and balances for ensuring better learning outcomes. The parents started to prefer private schools at much higher costs. The ASER (2020)[13], released in October 2020, has revealed that because of the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on family income, a reverse shift in the parental preference in favour of government schools is taking place.[14] The NEP 2020 has already highlighted the importance of the public-funded schools in the reform agenda for universalization of school education. The shift in parental preference for government schools gives an opportunity for optimization of resource use in school education.

It is also noteworthy that the MHRD has announced India's participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the year 2021. The PISA test is an international assessment conducted by the OECD that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years. India did not volunteer over a decade after it finished 72nd among the 73 nations who participated in the same PISA test in 2009, beating only Kyrgyzstan. Even if the student participants from India being thoroughly trained to appear in the PISA 2021 achieve good results, it will hardly do any good to our education system

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[12]Webspages of Pratham, www.pratham.org

[13]Webspages of Pratham, www.pratham.org

[14]Webspages of Pratham, www.pratham.org

except revealing the anomalous inequalities in the learning outcomes.

Minimising the School Dropout

The urgency of minimizing the dropout rates and getting back huge number of out of school children in the fold of school education are appropriately highlighted in the NEP 2020. Again, no new panacea could be offered. Interestingly in West Bengal and few other states women candidates appearing in the Secondary Board examinations are outnumbering the male candidates for almost a decade. The dropout rate of male students at the 8th standard is noticeably increasing for some years. A large number of elementary-level male students drop out of schools to work as migrant labour. For long incentives to girl students are being used as the instrument of achieving women empowerment and gender parity in education. This is absolutely important for further encouraging and sustaining girl students in institutional education. The NEP 2020 should have deeply analysed the evolving gender balance in school education. In Indian context it is imperative to conceive special incentive schemes for the school boys for retaining them in the system. The out of school students may be brought back by a suitably designed incentive scheme. In the post Covid situation with suitably designed incentive schemes, the displaced young migrant workers may be re-inducted in the local school system for vocational education which is proposed as an integral part of general education in the NEP 2020.

Revamping the Curricular and Pedagogical Structure

Here the NEP 2020 recommends thorough reconfiguration to make it responsive and relevant to the developmental needs and interests of learners at different stages corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8 (Foundational), 8-11 (Preparatory), 11-14 (Middle), and 14-18 years (Secondary), respectively. The key overall thrust of curriculum and pedagogy reform across all stages will be to move the education system towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn - and away from the culture of rote learning as is largely present today. To quote the NEP 2020, "The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills." The task of framing an integrated national curricular and pedagogical framework has been left to the NCERT.

Two observations are pertinent. First, the targets spelt out and the measures suggested are indeed what India is long waiting to experience. But no implementation roadmap is provided. In 2005 a National Curriculum Framework was published by the NCERT and the proposed constructivist pedagogy contained detailed framework of how to imbibe in students an ability to create knowledge rather than remaining passive as the receivers. Lot of money was spent on preparation of training manuals and actual

training of innumerable teachers under the 'pedagogical parameter shift'. But the learning outcome could hardly be improved. Second, it has become the lofty Indian style to place philosophical stress on character building and holistic development of the school children without little reflection on how integrated a child's development is with the dynamics of the society she lives in. The teaching community is also not a heavenly entity detached from the society. The political and societal will to reduce violence and crime is perhaps the most important factor in making the social forces cooperative and compatible with the professed goals of school education.

Teachers and the NEP

Much has been said about teacher related issues. While the recommendations are very important, they are hardly new. A very novel and interesting idea is to encourage peer tutorship. The brighter students will be encouraged to master self-learning at a higher level for teaching other students. This might be one mechanism to make them more responsible. Pertinently the NEP 2020 has placed thrust on restoration of the status and prestige of teachers as this is absolutely essential for authoritative delivery of educational services. But in this process the agency role of the teacher has not been set in proper perspective. There is no reflection as to how the teachers could self-preserve their dignity by undertaking coordinated effort to produce reasonable learning outcomes. Similarly, the thrust on continuity of a

superior mid-day meal programme backed additionally by nutritious tiffin for the school children is to be highly appreciated. No one can deny that in the Indian scenario of extensive malnutrition and hunger of our children, this direct delivery of food to the children is indeed one effective instrument of universalization of quality school education. But the discontents created by the mid-day meal programme among the stakeholders especially the teachers, have not been taken into account for suggesting an appropriate delivery system. For ensuring better learning outcomes, the cornerstone of the NEP 2020, the delivery of these services might be entrusted to the BDO/ equivalent office outside the school administration. Plenty of cases involving the Head Teachers of many schools in alleged corruption in the mid-day meal money/supplies have been reported tarnishing the image of the 'teacher'. Also, the visible trade-off between teaching responsibility and feeding responsibility is impacting quality teaching hours and is hampering internal monitoring of academic standards. Engagement of teachers in off-campus non-teaching activities has become a routine for past few decades. Strong political will, vigilant bureaucracy and a conscious parents' community can inspire the teachers to be more productive in their primary assignment. Once the culture is reset in right track, the suggested reforms will produce expected results. While the NEP 2020 has underscored the pivotal role of the public schools in the proposed overhaul of the

education sector, curiously it resolved not to touch upon such critical constraints on the performance of the teachers working in the public schools.

Other Focus Areas in NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 has given due importance to the issue of equitable and inclusive education which has been extensively discussed and explored since the SSA days. Also, the issue of efficient resourcing and effective governance through school complexes/clusters has been discussed time and again without much visible change towards optimisation of resource use by suitable inter-school sharing. The NEP has rightly underscored the need of cooperative governance which can be better organised by forming school complexes/clusters.

Standard Setting in School Education

For the first time the NEP 2020 has highlighted the issue of standard setting in school education. To quote the NEP 2020, "An effective quality self-regulation or accreditation system will be instituted for all stages of education including pre-school education - private, public, and philanthropic - to ensure compliance with essential quality standards."[15] For the purpose, the NEP recommends that the States/UTs will set up an independent, State-wide body called the State School Standards Authority (SSSA) and that the SSSA will set minimum benchmarks of some basic parameters

(namely, safety, security, basic infrastructure, number of teachers across subjects and grades, financial probity, and sound processes of governance), which shall be followed by all schools. Surprisingly there is no mention of setting benchmarks for learning outcomes. In the field of higher education, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) have been doing the task of standard setting for decades. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) is also promoting the institutional drive for achieving higher standard in higher education for the last few years. Linking financial assistance to performance has played a role in enhancing self-motivation of the institutions for better performance and influence social perception. The proposed SSSAs may gain from the rich expertise and experience of the NAAC which might facilitate much desired broad uniformity in standard of school education across states.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 is a very important document which has tried to provide a new architecture in both school education and higher education. But the million-dollar question is from where requisite funds will flow to support the implementation of the NEP 2020. The policy document has not chalked out any detailed financial scheme. In fact, the NEP 2020 has not spelt out any meaningful

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[15]NEP 2020 document, p31

roadmap for implementation of the grand reform agenda. This is the most glaring weakness of the NEP 2020.

The rudimentary reflections on the financial requisite as is found in the NEP 2020 and the DNEP 2019, reduce to a doubling of the proportion of public expenditure allocated to education from the current 10 per cent to 20 per cent over the coming decade. However, this tentative pre-Covid calculation was contingent on two fundamental assumptions. First, the Indian economy would grow adequately to reach the size of around USD 10 trillion by 2030-32 and second that the tax-GDP ratio would continue to rise. The sharp downturn of the economy due to the Covid pandemic and the consequent massive shortfall in the tax revenues of both the Union and the State Governments, have rendered both the assumptions untenable for present. One wonders why the NEP 2020 has been announced at this juncture when much concern has already been expressed at different knowledgeable quarters about restoration of the pre-Covid standard of school education, let alone reforms. Astounding learning and related income losses due to school closures in South Asia are reported in important research documents. According to a recent World Bank report, nearly 391 million students in the South Asian countries are kept out of school in primary and secondary education, further complicating efforts to resolve the learning crisis [World Bank (2020)]. While most governments have made enormous efforts to mitigate the impact of school closures, it has been difficult to engage children through remote learning initiatives. The Report observes that this is resulting in enormous dropouts and substantial learning losses, which will have a lifetime impact on the productivity of a generation of students. The Report apprehends the pandemic may cause up to 5.5 million students to drop out from the education system. The impact on learning is equally enormous. Children have been out of school for approximately 9 months. Being out of school for that long means that children not only stop learning new things, they also forget some of what they have learned. The projected learning loss for the region is 0.5 years of learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS), falling from 6.5 LAYS to 6.0 LAYS, an enormous setback from recent advances in schooling.

While the insight, wisdom, reflections and above all the huge reform agenda as contained in the NEP 2020 have great value in setting a policy direction in the field of education in entirety from early childhood education to the frontier research zones, the timing of the announcement has pushed the grand exercise into backfoot. Instead, the Indian Government could have published an interim policy of education aimed at recovering the lost ground due to the COVID-19 pandemic and postpone the announcement of the NEP 2020 till normalcy is restored.

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New Education Policy and the Scenario of Higher Education

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Professor Sanchari Roy Mukherjee has been engaged in post graduate teaching at the Department of Economics, North Bengal University, over the last 32 years. Having graduated from Presidency College, Kolkata, she completed her master's degree in Economics from University of Calcutta. She has been a member of various committees and an UGC nominee in governing bodies of various colleges in Eastern India. In a candid conversation with IMI Konnect, she shared her personal opinion on the new education policy and the scenario of higher education.

IMI Konnect: *What do you think about the pros and cons of the existing higher education system in India?*

SRM: The existing higher education system takes into account freedom of choice, affordability, and accessibility, and is inclusive in its admission process. Another advantage is that the 3 + 2 system provides sufficient time for students to specialise in specific subjects. However, I should mention a couple of issues as cons of the system. First, the dwindling of public expenditure in higher education has been a matter of concern over the past few decades, having a negative impact on teaching and research. Decline in state funding for higher education significantly led to a loss of teaching and research staff; however, while student intake did not decline, the staff were expected to perform under pressure with 'fewer resources'. Thus, both academics and the administrative work suffered grossly. Second, over the past two decades there has been 'corporatisation, commercialisation and managerialism of education generally, and in higher education in particular, and it is especially important to assess the impact of these on working, learning …..' conditions. This is as per the book titled *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness and Gender* by Lynch, Grummell and Devine in 2012[1] and a chapter by Holborow and O'Sullivan in 2017 on Austerity Ireland and the Neo-liberal University: Hollow Enterprise[2].

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[1]Lynch, K., Grummell, B., & Devine, D. (2012). New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness and Gender. *Springer*.

[2]Nixon, J. (Ed.). (2017). Higher Education in Austerity Europe. *Bloomsbury Publishing*.

To elaborate, my third point is that new managerial modes of monitoring and appraisal have most often translated directly into auditing of financial statements and the metrics of Academic Performance Indicator (API) scores. Productivity rewards and incentives are far and few, especially in public institutions. Thus, individual aggrandisement gets primacy over institutional advancement. Again, professional trust has taken a backseat. 'The institutionalisation of performance appraisal practices whereby people are individually audited and rewarded for productivity on an ongoing basis is a signature feature of managerialism. As auditing is built on principles of financial accounting, what can be counted numerically and translated directly into a financial statement is what matters most; professional trust and judgement are displaced by formal auditing and inspections. As there is no metric for goodwill that will count in individualised appraisals, people are encouraged to be calculating and self-focused' as Muller (2018)[3] puts it.

IMI Konnect: *In this context, do you think the incentives for research is adequate in the present system?*

SRM: There is a vast divide in provisioning of incentives to teachers to undertake research and quality publications, between state run and private universities, and between central and state universities. Thus, obtaining higher grades in NAAC accreditation and subsequently getting more funds from UGC and other funding institutions propel an university into a higher growth path. On the contrary, a remote university struggling to keep up with the advanced university, is given a lower grade owing to infrastructural and other deficiencies, and consequently is given a lower quantum of funds, which further constrains development of the university in all directions. Thus, it is a vicious cycle from which these universities find it extremely difficult to evolve. Moreover, recent trend in working without 'time boundaries' to publish and flourish, has had unequal work pressures on the genders with women struggling to keep up with the pace of professional advancements.

IMI Konnect: *A significant recommendation made in NEP 2020 is to allow multidisciplinary education in all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). What is your take on this?*

SRM: A multidisciplinary approach to higher education can cater to the needs of the students who may have aptitudes in diverse disciplines. For example, a student may be very good in Mathematics and yet may have a keen interest in History or Fine Arts etc. Thus the student will get the opportunity to study the subjects he/she prefers. However, for this to be put on offer, firstly, the institutions are required to be well-equipped to offer such diverse disciplines across the board, and secondly, the future of the students in terms of

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[3]Muller, J. Z. (2018). *The Tyranny of Metrics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

pursuing a career in any of the disciplines with such combinations and subsequent opportunities in the job market, will take time to take off. Some incentives and backup in terms of scholarships and fellowships, need to be provided to act as a buffer in case of such delayed responses from the job market.

IMI Konnect: *What are the implications of the proposal for removal of the M.Phil course? Do you see this as a wise move?*

SRM: With the introduction of a compulsory 6-month Research Course Work Programme for both M.Phil and Ph.D. students since 2009, I feel that a direct entry into the Ph.D. research programme will be worthwhile for the students. A rigorous entrance examination and a rigorous pre-research training through a one year (and not 6-months) Research Coursework will be useful for the researchers to complete their Ph.D. within the stipulated time frame. Thus, M.Phil is not really mandatory for transitioning to a Ph.D. programme.

Further, in the absence of the M.Phil programme, the number of Ph.D. candidates that a teacher can supervise may be increased so that a higher number of candidates can be enrolled for the Ph. D. Programme, compensating for the number lost with the withdrawal of the M.Phil. programme. The number of candidates that a teacher can supervise must be left to the Board of Research Studies (BRS) to determine, because the BRS will have enough knowledge about

the research capability of the departmental faculty members. Limiting the number makes it difficult for even best candidates to pursue Ph.D. programme and a career in academics. The above is justifiable once we think in terms of extending higher education to a wider population base. In the absence of enough opportunities to pursue Ph.D., there will be a shortfall of teachers with Ph.Ds, since from 2021 there is a directiive from the UGC to recruit teachers with Ph.D. degrees.

IMI Konnect: *The Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) will henceforth be funding the universities and colleges. It is expected to replace the National Council for Teacher Education, All India Council for Technical Education and the University Grants Commission. How is this expected to impact the HEIs?*

SRM: Pooling resources provides the scope to reap the benefit of economies of scale in operations. However, a monolithic structure like HEGC will have some inherent problems of having to grapple with hundreds of sections for each category of operations. Efficient coordination of such operations and managerial proficiency in each division can only ensure effective implementation of policies in higher education. While having everything under one roof may have its advantages, any setback in one operation or division will have a ripple effect on the others and the institution might run the risk of disintegrating. Further, each of these institutions, namely the NCTE, ICTE and

the UGC have, over the years, developed their expertise, which will be largely eroded if the present institutional structure is dismantled. Instead, it will be more worthwhile for Higher Education Grants Council to act as an umbrella organisation for better coordination and synergy in use of funds and regulation of HEIs in India.

IMI Konnect: *How do you feel graded autonomy granted to colleges would impact the quality of higher education?*

SRM: Autonomy of HEIs is a pre-requisite for advancement of higher education in the country. Autonomous colleges like Ramkrishna Mission Ashram College, St. Xavier's, Miranda House, St. Stephen's etc., have designed courses and skill development programmes that match the demand from the industry. It is also true that of 747 autonomous colleges approved by the UGC, not all of them have excelled or achieved the desired goal. Experience shows that autonomy of government aided HEIs has often failed to meet the needs of the hour and without any progression.

IMI Konnect: *As the foreign universities now are able to set up their campuses in India, do you think it would create a healthy competitive scenario in the higher education domain and enhance the standard of education?*

SRM: India needs substantial increase in investment in higher education to increase its current Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education. However, establishment of foreign universities will create opportunity, which can only be availed by students who can afford to pay. Possibly, the large pool of students who move to foreign universities abroad, may now opt to study in the extended campus of these universities in India. Hence, these institutions will not create competition for the national universities. However, there will be competition for project funds, with substantial funding for research activities made available by the well-heeled private institutions. Government and government aided institutions suffer from red tape, project delays sometimes preventing them from being executed efficiently.

IMI Konnect: *There has been a rising concern that the new education policy will lead to privatisation of HEIs. How relevant is this concern according to you?*

SRM: The All India Survey of Higher Education (2017-18) reports that 38 per cent of the universities are privately run institutions. Private unaided colleges are 64.7 per cent of all colleges and 46.7 per cent of the students at college level are enrolled in them. In 2017, the number of new colleges established was 1147 of which 834 were private unaided colleges. This means privatisation has already made inroads in a big way in India. However, when almost two-third of the colleges are unaided private colleges, the bulk of the students (52 per cent) are in government and government-aided HEIs. Privately managed universities were 38 per cent of the total number of universities in

2017. Privatisation has already happened and this trend will continue unabated under the NEP 2020 too.

IMI Konnect: *What do you think about the possible implications of the proposal on teaching and research universities on the quality of higher education in the country?*

SRM: Research needs funding and institutions play a vital role in providing funds for such activities. Seed money for research work and provisioning of small grants each year will help to enhance research activities. Large projects may be sanctioned through competitive procedure, but small grants must be made available for projects and for participating in international and national seminars and conferences. It is only then teachers can be asked to deliver. A centralised pool of research grant will have its challenges. Government HEI does not provide any seed money for project/consultation bidding which will therefore lead to more difficulty for the teachers. Also, provision for publication fees for submission of paper needs to be taken care of, which is difficult for a teacher to pay when there is no grant available for it. Teaching at the university level devoid of research will not help to improve the quality of teaching at such level. Most of the optional/ elective courses offered by teachers are outcome of research work pursued by the teacher. Hence, recourse to increased research funding in all universities will pave the way for an increased potentiality amongst teacher-researchers.

IMI Konnect: *Do you think this NEP 2020 will enable Indian universities to feature in global ranking in another ten years?*

SRM: NEP 2020 does not guarantee any funding of higher educational institutions. In many cases, basic infrastructure like basic wifi/internet facility is not available and even when available, it is of poor quality. Books and journal funding are not only inadequate but is declining in real value. Few privileged institutions may achieve rank but the success of any education policy will be measured by its ability to improve the median ranking of HEIs in India as a whole. Just a handful of institutions obtaining international ranking will be just outliers and it will not be a true measure of the impact of NEP.

National Education Policy 2020:
New Wine in Old Bottle?

"Education is the Manifestation of the Perfection Already in Man".
Swami Vivekananda

Sahana Roy Chowdhury*

Introduction

It is a general perception and a common error to confuse education with 'schooling'. To an educationalist education is well beyond schooling, it is a process of facilitating learning, knowledge acquisition, building and re-building the skill set and creating and re-creating human values. Education, to an economist is a 'public good'- a 'merit good', where social benefit is well above the private benefit. Education catalyses transformational changes thus, for any progressive society a comprehensive vision, plan or policy document on education is an absolute necessity. If in a society, the returns to education are the chain of value additions, which may not be that explicit as we can expect from commercial or economic investments depending upon the structure and the *change in* the structure of the society, role of the government or the public policy planner becomes crucial in outlining a *credible* and *practicable* education policy. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020 broadly aims a transformational reform in the education ecosystem of the country in a time-bound manner. The NEP mentions: "Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equity." The principle of equity and inclusivity remain at the core of NEP 2020. After independence India designed three education policies; the first being formulated in 1968 with major emphasis on compulsory education till age 14.[1] The second one was introduced in 1986 with its major emphasis on removing disparity and attaining uniformity in access across different social groups. The recent NEP 2020 is an attempt to balance with the changing local and global landscape. There are mentions of preserving and promoting India's rich tradition, diverse ancient and modern culture and the knowledge system, and to learn about their influences on the global literature in ancient times. For long this has been at the core of the education policies in many of the European and OECD countries that have

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[1]https://educationtimes.com/article/editors-pick/77527635/NEP-2020-A-comparison-with-the-1986-education-policy

shown excellence in their education outcomes, e.g. Germany, France. In France for example, language has been at the very heart of their education policy; there are a host of foreign languages, regional languages and classical languages such as Greek and Latin that pupils need to learn and are offered to acquire[2]. NEP tries to integrate India's education system with the contemporary and rapidly evolving global ecosystem while preserving India's rich ancient traditional ethos and cultural eminence in the learning mechanism.

As categorized by the World Bank in 2016 India as one of the leading emerging nations, could manage to make its place one notch higher on the economic strata as a lower-middle-income category country. Facts, figures, theories and hypothesis on socio-economic transformation and upward mobility tell us that as you grow rich you emphasise on quality life, 'value creation' and therefore prioritize on education and learning. Quite unexpectedly, when compared globally or even with the emerging peers, India continues to be an exception in terms of both education input (public spending in education) and outcome indicators (PISA score, for example). Conversely, it remained an unresolved paradox that Indian expatriates and the highly skilled diaspora play pivotal role globally and are the game changers in the politico-economic arena. Also, the global value chain and service trade, which are highly skill intensive today, have deep-rooted

association with India in some or other way. *Well-carved* education policies with *far-sighted* objectives and *dynamic* perspectives can only *nudge* India to realize its potential.

NEP sets multiple targets starting from universalization of education, bringing the drop-outs back within the education network thereby achieving 100 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2030. At the core of the policy guideline are the overarching vision of '*access* to education', 'access to *quality* education', '*holistic* or multi-disciplinary learning', '*critical* thinking rather than rote learning', '*collaborative* and experimental learning', and '*flexibility* to choose learning trajectories' among others. Noticeably, NEP is sketched in sync with the target timelines of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN. While deciphering NEP it is imperative to mention that it is a 'policy' and not a 'law' as of now, implying complementary changes in 'regulation' are to be designed further, to implement the proposals envisioned in this policy document. Since education is in the concurrent list in our constitution such regulatory changes are to eventually, come out from both the State and the Central governments in different domains of the education system in India.

Impetus on Holistic Development and Social Inclusion

As it has been rightly pointed out and elaborated in NEP that with the rapidly

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[2]Costa James, Patricia Lambert (2009). France and Language(s): Old Policies and New Challenges in Education. Towards a Renewed Framework?HAL Id: halshs-00439199 https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00439199.

changing global socio-political and economic ecosystem it is crucial for the future players in the labour market, entrepreneurs and key contributors in the education system to not only to learn, but to be adaptive in the process and be flexible to learn 'how to learn'. Also, it emphasises on developing creative potential and enhancing cognitive capacities such as critical thinking, problem solving etc. This underscores the crucial role of the educators in building country's future citizens.

A new pedagogical and curriculum restructuring is envisioned, where hitherto 10+2 structure will change to 5+3+3+4 structure covering age 3-18, the age ranges are 3-8 (foundational stage, pre-school and Grade 1-2), 8-11 (preparatory stage, Grade 3-5), 11-14 (Middle stage, Grade 6-8), 14-18 (Secondary stage, Grade 9-12). In the 10+2 structure 3-6 age group was not covered in the mainstream education. Worldwide it is accepted and scientifically proven that children of this age undergo rapid cognitive development, and well-designed curriculum at this stage help in stimulating better overall learning. The NEP envisaged a strong base of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). This will consist of a multi-faceted, activity and inquiry based learning. Major emphasis will be given to foundational literacy and numeracy and basic operations for lifelong learning. An estimated 5 crores children in elementary schools have a large proportion that lacks such skills, to read, write and comprehend text. The NEP therefore lays a big push on bridging this gap, the longer run

vision being achieving universal foundational literacy by 2025 in primary schools.

The Anganwadis will be integrated with ECCE and Anganwadi workers will be trained under different certificate and diploma programs which will run through digital mode to ensure minimum disruption in their current work. To integrate early childhood development and school education along with social integration of children in backward areas, the implementation and planning of ECCE will be carried out in a well-coordinated manner by the Ministry of HRD, Women and Child Development and Tribal Affairs together. Such convergence of multiple schemes and targets under one umbrella is an efficient expenditure management mechanism in public policy practices.

NEP underscores that to achieve the above mentioned targets in socially backward regions, the first goal is to fill the vacant

Figure 1: Previous Academic Structure vs. New Pedagogical & Curricular Structure
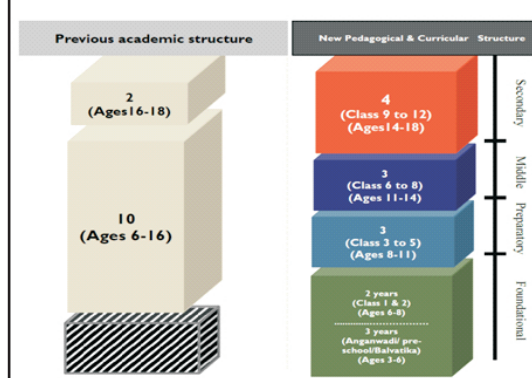
teachers' posts and fulfil the target 30:1 pupil-teacher ratio, especially in the backward areas. Inclusivity being an important dimension of NEP, and as per NSSO 75th survey of 2017-18 the out of school children in the age group 6-17 was 3.22 crore; bringing back these children in education is a commendable target, and then achieving 100 per cent GER from pre-school to the secondary level by 2030 will be a quantum jump. Literature on the efficacy of public policy in education discusses widely on whether schools in PPP mode or public schools or pure private schools are better performers. NEP focuses on strategies such as partnership in schooling to ensure higher GER in backward regions and it mentions that philanthropic and public partnership are to be encouraged in such regions, which is a welcome move. Reason behind engaging NGOs/philanthropic organizations again, is to integrate local culture and encourage variations, demography and geography and alternate models of education that already exist in India. With regard to the mode of communication in teaching a well-accepted fact is that students learn non-trivial things faster when taught or explained in mother-tongue. Therefore, teachers will be encouraged to take a bi-lingual approach. A three-language formula will be finally implemented where the language choice will be made by the State, region and the students.

On the operational front NEP takes note of a data backed fact that certain geographical areas have high concentration of Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). This classification is based on economic as well as on gender criteria. These are to be identified as Aspirational Districts and regions of the country that have high population of SEDGs and are to be declared as Special Education Zones (SEZs). Here all the education policies are to be implemented with additional effort. In order to enhance nation's capacity to build an equitable and quality educational set up for the girl child and the transgender children, the NEP mentions of creating a special category funding viz. the gender-inclusion fund.

Local Drive in Global Frame

It is mentioned in NEP that the national curriculum framework will be undertaken by NCERT, and it will be revised in every 5-10 years. An AI based software will be developed and used for regular interaction of students, parents and schools via interactive questionnaires to track students' growth and progress. Mainstreaming of India's traditional and cultural values as depicted in Jataka, Hitopadesh, fable tales, will be done in the education system as per NEP. On the recruitment front to encourage motivated and outstanding students to enter the teaching profession in rural areas, a 4-year integrated B.Ed. program will be initiated with merit-based scholarship. To mitigate shortage of quality teachers especially in the rural and backward localities these teachers will be trained on regular basis using the state-of-the art technologies on contemporary educational

system and curriculum that are globally acknowledged. Promotion and salary improvement are to be made purely merit-based rather than seniority-based.

Emphasis on School to Job Transition: Vocational Education and Training

To have hands-on experience of local and traditional vocational crafts such as carpentry, pottery, gardening, metal work etc., students will have to take these courses from Grade 6-8 as decided by the states, and that has to be mapped by the local skilling needs. Specific courses on ethno-medicinal and traditional crop plant cultivation, natural farming etc. will be covered under mainstream education system, and students will be encouraged to visit different parts of the country under student exchange program. The 12th five year plan estimated that less than 5 per cent of Indian workforce in the age group 19-24 had received formal vocational education, as compared to 96 per cent in South Korea, 75 per cent in Germany and 52 per cent in USA. As per the existing design it was pointed out that the students with Vocational Education (VE) were not provided with the openings in general education, which created lack of vertical mobility of these students. The inferior social status and hierarchy associated with VE in comparison with the mainstream education needs an overhaul. The NEP as a policy takes serious note of this and envisions integrating general education and VE stream of education and flexible mobility in between the streams. Also, it is mentioned that by 2025 at least 50 per cent of the learners should have exposure to VE; this will align our education policy with SDG 4.4 and help realize India's demographic dividend potential to a great extent.

Importance of Research and Development: Research Funding

The research and innovation funding and investment in India are meagre 0.69 per cent as compared to 4.3 per cent in Israel, 4.2 per cent in South Korea. To trigger a congenial ecosystem in a synergistic manner NEP envisions establishing a National Research Fund (NRF). The organizations/agencies that currently fund research such as DST, ICMR, ICAR, DAE, UGC etc. will keep on funding but NRF will coordinate with the funding agencies, identify good research, and build liaison and synergies to ensure minimal disruption in research funding. NRF will fund research in all disciplines in a competitive manner and will be constituted as an independent body of rotating board of governors who are recognised as best researchers and innovators in respective domains. This is definitely a welcome move, since there have been overlap of funds for research in similar domains while in some other domains perhaps, fund flow remained inadequate to incentivize research. Overseeing and monitoring the funding network with a holistic vision will definitely yield better outcome in terms of the coverage, depth and efficiency of the funding mechanism.

Higher Education Institutes: Importance Given to Three Key Areas

The NEP devices policies and strategies in the Higher Education ecosystem, which is highly fragmented at present. The rigid separation of disciplines and streamlining of students at narrow areas of study are among the major problems. In the existing set up of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) network, as rightly identified by NEP there are certain regulatory inefficiencies as well. The complex nomenclature of 'deemed to be university', 'affiliating university', 'affiliating technical university', 'unitary university' etc. will be replaced by 'university'. There is limited emphasis on research and on peer-reviewed research funding in many of these educational institutions, creating huge pool of educated but unemployable students. The policy envisions creating more multi-disciplinary graduate and post-graduate universities with greater autonomy, and single-stream HEIs will be phased out in a timely manner. There will be a single regulator, and increased access, equity and greater opportunities for quality public education will be prioritised by the regulator. The university will have a range of multi-disciplinary institutions that put equal emphasis on research and teaching (Research-intensive University), lay more importance in teaching but do conduct significant research (Teaching-intensive University) and autonomous degree-granting colleges that are large number of multi-disciplinary organizations. By the timeline 2040 it is envisaged that all the HEIs will aim for becoming multi-disciplinary with high student intake – target increasing GER from 26.3 per cent (2018) to 50 per cent by 2035. Large number of HEIs are to be built in underserved regions to meet equity, access and inclusion. The HEIs are expected to provide opportunities for lifelong learning, online learning and emphasises on open distance learning; these are part of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)– 4. The Choice Based Education System will be revised to inculcate innovation and HEIs will design examinations for a comprehensive assessment of students rather than taking high-stake examinations. Another important target for HEIs is to trigger internationalization at home - making India a global study destination, and intensifying collaboration with high-quality foreign institutions.

On building and catalysing to build quality professional institutions NEP identifies that professional education has become an integral part in the education ecosystem globally. Three key areas under this have been identified: stand-alone agricultural universities, health science and legal universities. These universities will be established eventually to grow as multi-disciplinary university for a holistic development of the education ecosystem.

Light but Tight Regulation

The NEP underscores role of regulation in curbing commercialization and economic

exploitation of parents by several private schools while not providing the desired level of quality education. The Department of School Education will be responsible for overall monitoring and policy making of public education system. To avoid conflict of interest it will not be involved in regulation or operation of schools. To ensure minimal quality and standard, states will set up State School Standards Authority (SSSA) who will set the norms on basic infrastructure as well as on quality, and the basic regulatory information will be self-disclosed publicly in a transparent manner. Grievances of all the stakeholders will be adjudicated and placed in the public domain. Public and private schools will be accredited on the same criteria.

NEP acknowledges that large amount of time of the teachers is spent on non-teaching activities such as mid-day meal related work, which is to be rationalized and made minimal. Teachers are to be given autonomy with regard to choosing means and aspects of pedagogy. Vertical mobility and career growth of teachers are to be incentivised strongly and designed accordingly, keeping in mind that adequate number of highest-quality teachers is to be retained in both the early stage schools as well as in the later stage schools (post-secondary).

Mitigating the Funding Issue

According to the U-DISE data 28 per cent of public primary schools and 14.8 per cent of upper primary schools have students less than 30 and number of students per grade in elementary schools on average was 14. Such small school is run economically at suboptimal level. Naturally, library, sports equipment or labs are not available in such schools because of fiscal constraint. But with geographic dispersion such schools will be there with some systemic challenges which are to be mitigated. Now that Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has been subsumed under Samagra Shiksha Scheme, the administrative cost structure should be aligned with the need of these small schools to increase their performance and fiscal efficacy. In order to enhance synergy among private and public schools twining/pairing of schools will be done as a strategic measure.

NEP Amidst Challenges and Priorities: A Global Stance

If we look into the thrusts given while framing education policies in recent times, after reviewing the changing scenarios and emerging needs we find that countries that are well recognized for their extremely efficient education policies and monitoring mechanisms mostly in Europe, are facing similar challenges and are making *adaptive* changes in their education policies in a gradual and timely manner. These are mostly related to the problem of inclusiveness, equity in the spread of quality education and vertical mobility in the education strata.

Global Standards and Best Practices in Education Policy

The first international normative mechanism

was devised in 1960 by UNESCO named Convention Against Discrimination Against Education (CADE),[3] which highlights making primary, secondary and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity: assure that the education standard (outcome, processes, content, structure) are of the same level in all public institutions, provide training to the teaching profession without discrimination. The guideline mentions of adopting and implementing a national educational strategy that includes provision for fundamental, secondary and higher education. Article 5(1)(A) of CADE adds that education should be directed to overall human personality development, strengthening human rights and fundamental freedom. It was recognized that to achieve full realization of the right not only primary but secondary education and higher education in its variant forms including technical and vocational education shall be generally available depending upon individual's capacity. Education has to be made flexible, adaptable to the changing needs of the society and students within their diverse socio-cultural settings.

The OECD makes a regular review[4] of the education outlook in the OECD countries and prepares country-wise yearly progress reports. It is well-known that the German model of education, the vocational education in particular, is quite valued worldwide. The OECD outlook of Germany for the year 2019 shows that PISA 2018 was above average in basic science (in OECD) and adult skill levels are strong as found in Adult Skills Survey (PIAAC), early childhood education and care (ECEC) has grown significantly and near universal among 3-5 years of children. However, there are some issues as pointed out by the review, is that there are inequities in achieving tertiary education across socio-economic groups. Despite focused inclusion strategies variation in drop-outs are rising consistently over years. Certain fiscal issues and funding related problems are emerging as the student numbers are rising, disparities in capacity creation are becoming prominent, and efficiency and sufficiency of funding are becoming central issues. These being the review and outcomes recognised by Germany, their recent education policy document has prioritised on integrating the socio-economic groups, identified those who have maximum drop-outs specially the migrants, and legal amendments such as the Recognition Act (2012), Vocational language training program (2016), the Digital pact for schools (2019) to improve the digital infrastructure in schools. The focus therefore in recent time education policies have shifted towards equity and quality. On the fiscal front, despite spending a lot on digitization and school infrastructure creation drive, Germany spent just 9.4 per cent of total public expenditure on education.

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[3]https://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education/convention-against-discrimination

[4]OECD (2020): Education Policy Outlook: Germany. www.oecd.org

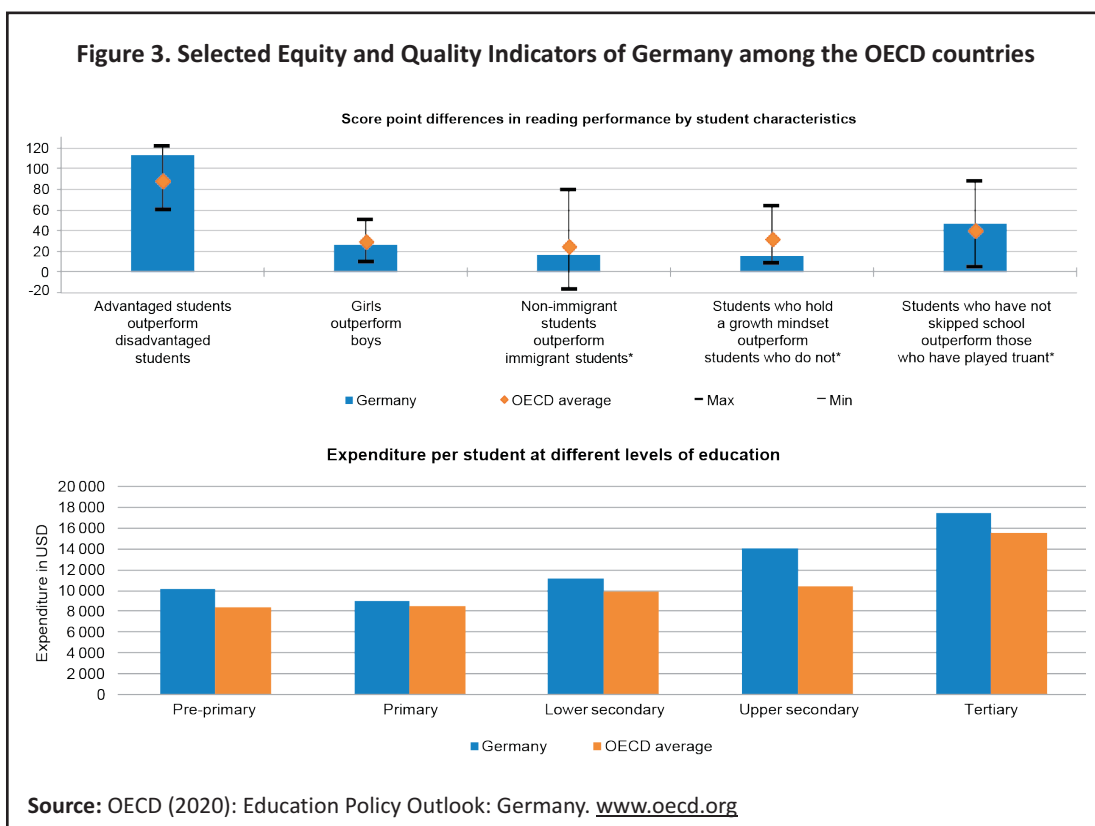# A Structure of Germany's Education System[5]

Figure 2. Structure of Germany's Education System

Source: OECD (2020): Education Policy Outlook: Germany. www.oecd.org
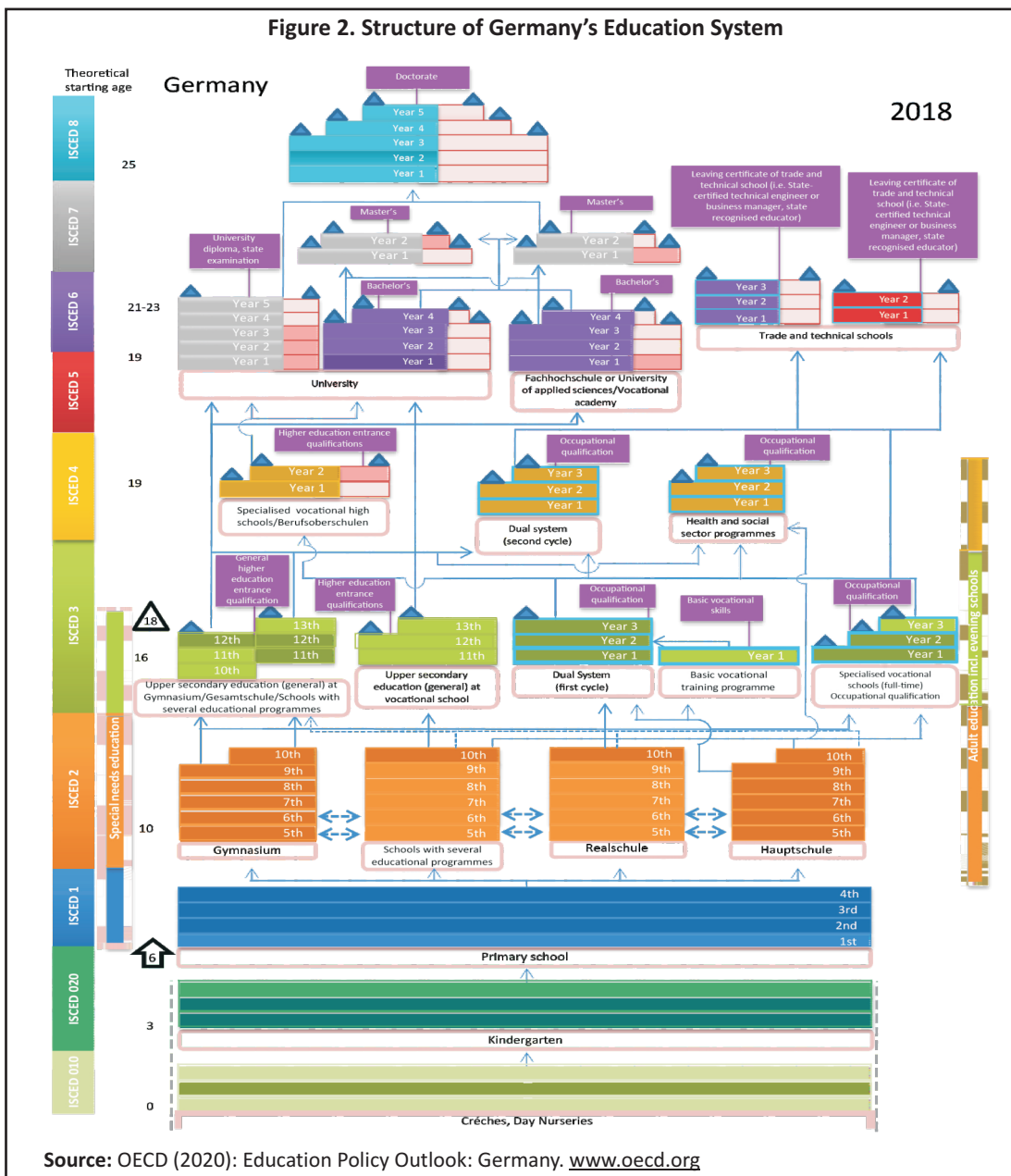
[5]OECD (2018): Slide 1 (oecd.org)

Early tracking system in Germany tracks students at the age of 10 and comes up with both between-school variation and within-school variation indices; also, it is observed that differences in performance scores reflect socio-economic differences. Tracking facilitates improving student's performance at various levels. However, among other key challenges, tracking may foster informal segregation between schools, such as well performing schools, mediocre and poor performers. Even the European Union in their growth and employment strategy 2020[6] has identified education and training as key policy area that drives Europe's social inclusion. In Germany, attending upper secondary is compulsory and they may enter general upper secondary or choose among four vocational streams. Germany's share of adults with at least upper secondary qualification was 87 per cent in 2018 (above OECD average of 83 per cent). The wage premium of tertiary graduates

Figure 3. Selected Equity and Quality Indicators of Germany among the OECD countries

Source: OECD (2020): Education Policy Outlook: Germany. www.oecd.org

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was highest in OECD at 69 per cent. In higher education Germany follows the Bologna model.[7] As in India, in Germany also education is governed by 16 Lander (states) and the federal government. Lander can legislate except in some basic laws, the federal ministry navigates tertiary and Vocational Education and Training (VET) national policy. Regarding funding, the majority of funding for primary and secondary level comes from the Lander, co-funding is mostly constitutionally prohibited except in some recent cases where it has become a national priority of extending education benefits such as digitization drive.

Therefore, on comparing the structure, outline and the preamble of NEP 2020 and the very recent education policies that evolved in select OECD countries that have historically outperformed others, it is evident that 'inclusion and equity' in access to quality education remains a big challenge yet to be achieved. Education policy globally, is now oriented towards mitigating this issue. Flexibility in the choice of the type of education with minimal regulatory hindrances, and a well-integrated VET and general education facilitate the easy transition and vertical mobility in the education strata. These strategies, as depicted in the best practices above, remained at the core of the policy outlines internationally. With no different challenges that India faces today in its education eco-system India's NEP 2020 explicitly mentions of adopting many of these best practices.

Expectations and Ways Ahead

The NEP 2020 outlined many aspirational objectives to overhaul India's education eco-system. Post independence this being the third policy framework on education and the first one in the 21st century. In the rapidly changing era of globalization with substantial integration of technology in the learning process, NEP has rightly emphasised on aligning India's education system with the emerging subject areas that will be of greater demand tomorrow. With such a quantum jump in the technological knowhow and knowledge sharing, and with the increasing need of establishing technology-intensive

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[7]The Bologna Process was launched in 1999 by the Education Ministers of 29 European countries in an attempt to bring coherence to higher education systems across the continent. After 1999 it was taken up by the European Union when the Union had only 15 member states, compared with 27 in 2011 after which it has grown to 47. So it extends far beyond the current EU borders. It set out in 1999 to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, which was launched on schedule in March of that year. The EHEA is a framework to allow easy comparison between the higher education systems of all participating countries. It comprises agreement on qualification frameworks, including the three cycle system of Bachelor degree, Master and Doctoral studies. It also covers quality assurance, so that students, graduates, universities and all other stakeholders can be confident in the quality of different systems and the work of different providers [https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/university/europe/bologna-process-explained].

value chains globally, leading emerging nations like India needs to modernize and reshape their education black-box that will transform today's learners to tomorrow's innovators.

The NEP as we have discussed, incorporates and sketches policies that are very similar to the globally acknowledged best practices, and are practiced in the OECD and in many European nations that have proven excellence in their education outcomes. However, there are many socio-economic and political challenges for India that are however, no different from the challenges that these advanced nations have faced and are facing while shaping their education policies. Inclusion and access to quality education are on top of these challenges. In India backward regions and people belonging to socio-economically backward groups have so far had limited access to education, and hence vertical mobility and transition hardly have happened for them. In the OECD countries the challenges relate transition of mostly the immigrants and their children, as compared with the non-immigrants and their children. Recently, these advanced nations have therefore incorporated 'inclusion principle' at the core of their education policies. At the core of its preamble India's NEP 2020 also lays similar emphasis on this issue.

Nonetheless, NEP being a policy so far and not a law, implementation remains a big challenge. Since education is in the concurrent list in India, and states are highly diverse in their socio-economic configuration, political priorities, levels of industrialization and with regard to their labour market challenges, it is a humongous task for them to set a common goal on education as sketched by the NEP. Moreover, greater coordination and cooperation of the Centre with the states are expected for the NEP proposals to realize.

Impact of NEP 2020 on Technical Education

Padmanav Acharya*

Padmanav Acharya is working as Professor and serving as Dean of Academic Affairs in National Institute of Industrial Engineering (NITIE) Mumbai. A Mechanical Engineering graduate, he has done his M.Tech and Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from IIT Kharagpur. His research interests include industrial engineering, logistics supply chain, project management and system dynamics. He has nearly 30 years of experience in teaching and research and has over sixty research publications in reputed journals. During his interaction with IMI Konnect, he shared his personal opinion regarding the impact of NEP 2020 on technical education.

IMI Konnect: *What do you think about the pros and cons of the existing higher education system in India?*

PA: India's higher education system has fairly large infrastructure with a budgetary outlay of more than ₹ 35,000 crore in 2018-19. It has adequately looked into the social and economic as well as gender diversity that exists in the country. Still a significant percentage of our higher education is fairly subsidised with government funding.

On the flip side there is still lack of desired flexibility in higher education system with regard to academic programme, curriculum structure, choice for student's career aspirations, paucity of quality faculty, and minimal industry-academia collaboration to name a few which haunts our higher education system.

IMI Konnect: *In NEP 2020 allowing multidisciplinary education in all HEIs is recommended. What is your take on this?*

PA: While the idea is good, there will be implementation challenges which need to be overcome for it to fructify. For example, there are not many engineering colleges which can offer electives in say Vedic Literature or say Fine Arts in an Electrical Engineering discipline. But online teaching-learning medium at national level, may come to help and Universities need to adopt the principle that 20 per cent of the courses can be done online as advocated by AICTE. However, there is no denying the fact that multidisciplinary education will help create multidimensional professionals.

IMI Konnect: *The Higher Education Grants Council henceforth is expected to replace the*

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National Council for Teacher Education, All India Council for Technical Education and the University Grants Commission. How is this expected to impact the HEIs?

PA: A single statutory body will better manage the multidisciplinary education system in a holistic manner. HEIs in my opinion will benefit from this from a variety of aspects, from resource mobilisation and consolidation which will eventually lead to optimisation of state funding.

IMI Konnect: *How do you feel graded autonomy granted to colleges would impact the quality of higher education?*

PA: Graded autonomy achieved in a time-phased manner will make Academic Institutions more responsible and accountable as far as their obligation to society in imparting quality education is concerned. Greater responsibility naturally comes with greater autonomy.

IMI Konnect: *As the foreign universities now are able to set up their campuses in India, do you think it would create a healthy competitive scenario in the higher education domain in terms of the enhancing the standard of education?*

PA: Certainly. You have rightly said, it will encourage healthy competition and will lead enhancing the quality of education. Mediocrity will have no place in higher education.

IMI Konnect: *There has been a rising concern that the new education policy will lead to*

privatisation of HEIs. How relevant is this concern according to you?

PA: State has supported higher education in the country for over seven decades now. I don't think it (NEP) will immediately lead to privatisation. But then time has come for more industry-institute interaction. Quality research has to be industry sponsored as it is the ultimate beneficiary of the same.

IMI Konnect: *The NEP focuses on further strengthening of e-learning platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM. Do you think lab-based technical education can be supplemented by digital mode of teaching using 'Virtual Labs'?*

PA: There is no substitute for live hands-on session in the labs. However, for theory subjects, since no curriculum can possibly do justice to every student's aspirations, there is huge utility of online learning platforms like SWAYAM, MOOCS, NPTEL and COURSERA. This way student can get access to niche subjects, latest developments as well as applications in technology from some of the best University faculty from not just India but also from across the globe.

IMI Konnect: *With the new education policy children can choose a science subject with liberal arts or subjects from other disciplines at school level. What impact will it have on the higher education in technical field? How will the affinity for engineering courses across the country be impacted?*

PA: I think this is a wonderful idea and brings in the desired flexibility everybody was

aspiring about. Many a time it has been seen and largely felt that regimented curriculum was producing one dimensional professionals who often were lacking in holistic approaches in their professional career. If a child has the option to choose say Painting or Music in lieu of say Social science or even Mathematics he/she should be allowed to do that. In such cases he/she can pursue his/her passion and may even come out as a better and happier individual having the satisfaction of studied something of his choice rather than something he never enjoyed but had to. Having said that, a minimum base level knowledge up to say primary level may be required in conventional subjects.

IMI Konnect: *What is your take on the emphasis on vocational education in NEP?*

PA: I too am all for it. Education has two major dimensions namely knowledge creation and work/career creation. Vocational education certainly looks after the latter.

IMI Konnect: *Tell us some important positive impact the NEP 2020 can have on technical education.*

PA: I hope NEP will be able to successfully foster engagement in technical education.

IMI Konnect: *Do you think this NEP 2020 will enable Indian Universities to feature in Global ranking in another ten years?*

PA: Absolutely. While some of our premier Institutions are doing exceptionally well with regard to entry level student quality and teaching learning outcomes as well as placement performance, same can't be said about their international collaboration, research outcomes, global diversity in education, flexibility in programme curriculum and so on and so forth.

COVID-19 and the Ensuing Changes in the Education Sector

Sanskriti Jhunjhunwala*

To say that COVID-19 has been a disruption to every daily activity in the life of every person, is an understatement and probably also a cliché. It has impacted each sector of industry, and everyone has been forced to adapt. One such industry that has been coerced into adaptation is education. The evolution of education, especially in India, has been fairly slow. Because of the population explosion, institutions have not had to really adapt and keep up with changing times in order to attract applicants. But 2020 has altered that in one fell swoop. This year, with schools and colleges having to stop physical operations indefinitely, students and institutional authorities were thrown into a place of uncertainty like never before. This year, they all had to adapt in order to keep teaching and to keep learning.

There have been many changes in the approach to education. Firstly, and most common, is the switch to e-learning. Most schools in India do not have their own platform or proper functional websites. Therefore, it is natural that online learning was a far cry for many of them, before the pandemic hit. Almost overnight, most schools and colleges had to switch to online classes. In fact, not just classes, but even exams had to be shifted online. The board exams that took place this year were interrupted midway. When the respective governing bodies tried to reschedule the remaining papers, they faced an uprising from students and parents alike. Since then, schools and colleges had to accept that they would need to rise to the challenge posed by the lockdown. It has been impressive to see them take on this task. Most institutions have gone virtual, and at this point are even functioning with full hours. Many of them have conducted examinations successfully. There is a semblance of normality to try and induce stability for students whose daily lives have become completely unrecognisable as compared to what they were before.

Looking at this from another lens, students too had to adapt to this new form of learning. There is merit in the "human touch", and the atmosphere in a brick-and-mortar classroom, which are no longer available to them. In addition, unprecedented hours of screen time are affecting the health of many students as well. Unfortunately, there seems to be no other alternative, because they cannot afford to take

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a step back from learning for an indefinite period of time. What has been amazing though, is that, even those families that do not have computers, have managed to create a setup using the omnipresent smartphones in order to continue their children's education. Many schools even in the interiors of India have adapted and gone online, increasing the exposure of students to many more resources than they have ever had before. Still, the fact remains, that even though the penetration of e-learning has been better than we could have imagined, only about 45 crore people in India have access to the internet. So there is still a large section of students who do not have access to virtual classrooms, or e-learning resources, and this may set them back in the future.

The second point to note is the growth in power of online learning platforms such as Coursera, Udemy and SkillShare to name a few. Though these platforms have existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, they have become far more of a household name due the COVID-19. The variety of courses on these sites is a boon for not just high school students, but anyone interested in using this time to upskill. A large chunk of urban adults have taken courses on these sites to learn a new skill or hobby, especially in the first few months of the pandemic. In addition to these international websites, even India has picked up the pace in its own platforms for open learning like Swayam, Gyandhara and the like. Open learning has gained most of its traction

because of the pandemic, and the course options are attractive to students from all age groups.

Thirdly, everyone being trapped at home has led to the adaptation of other organizations to their virtual versions. Some of the best museums in the world like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, have given free access to many of their exhibits online. Many universities are providing online tours, and so are many zoos, aquariums and other wildlife-related organizations. This is extremely important because it introduces students to learning beyond the four walls of a classroom. It also introduces them to many careers they may not have thought of before such as curation, marine biology, zoology and other uncommon professions, by giving them a glimpse into the line of work much earlier in life. Yes, the doors of our homes though had to be closed, but the doors of learning have been thrown wide open. One can now learn from and absorb marvels from across the planet from their own house, without travelling expenses. In my opinion, this will bring about the levelling of the playing field between economic classes to some degree.

In line with the thought above, there are also many events that are now happening online as opposed to in person with limited attendance. The number of webinars, panel discussions and workshops that have happened online is unheard of. Not only the quantity, but the quality has also jumped manifold. Sitting in Kolkata, one can attend a webinar hosted by

top professionals in New York City, without having to shell out even a dime. This too, opens up the opportunity to learn in a very different way than we are accustomed to. It also exposes students to myriad perspectives and advancements from across the globe. Many such events with world-class speakers took place in the past too, but the costs of congregating experts from around the world were astronomical, and hence, only the cream of organizations could afford this. Consequently, the patrons of such organizations were also the cream of society, thereby limiting this form of learning to a select few. On the contrary, due to negligible costs, most of these events have been free to attend now, which once again, increases accessibility and levels the playing field.

Education Policy Reforms

An important point to mention in terms of adaptation is also on the part of education policy makers. The New Education Policy of 2020 is a major reformation in the sector. The last major ripple was made in 1986, almost 35 years prior. Education policies in India were in dire need of refurbishment, and while this new policy does not go all the way in catching up with the times, it does take some necessary steps in that direction. Something that the pandemic has taught us is the ubiquity of uncertainty, and in these times, dynamism is of utmost importance. Policy makers are trying to make education interdisciplinary through their new measures, as they have started realising the importance of this in the

development of students. In my opinion, this is a very striking change made by the NEP, because almost all the Indian boards followed a stream specialisation contrary to foreign boards such as IB and IGCSE, where lines between streams are blurred. This also gives rise to the question of whether colleges will also follow suit in the future. Liberal Arts education, which follows the principle of flexibility and interdisciplinary curricula, is quickly gaining traction in India. Over the past 10 years, the liberal arts colleges in India have reported increasing numbers of applications, and alongside, more liberal arts colleges are being inaugurated as well. This is also a sign that educationalists are waking up to advancements in the field and attempting to bring India in line with this progress.

COVID-19 has acted as that wake-up call that was needed in higher education in India. It has opened up students and educators to learning in new ways, and forced us all to avail of the marvels of technology. Policy makers too, have had to put on their seat belts and prepare for the acceleration in the field. It has been heartening to see everyone gearing up for these changes and taking it in their stride. In addition, it has led to the rapid increase in the kinds of resources available for learning, not just for the conventional definition of "higher education", but for wider subjects and audiences. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that every time we feel in control, the universe is prepared to send a curveball in our direction. If COVID-19 has

taught us anything, it is that we will never know everything, but also, that we should never stop learning, no matter what the circumstances.