

The National Education Policy was introduced to make the Indian education system globally viable. The government aims to give the Indian students more competitive edge in comparison to their global counterparts, establish world class educational institutions throughout the country.

National Education Policy, 2020

Recently, the Indian government has replaced a 34-year-old National Policy on Education, framed in 1986, with the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020. In 1964, the need for a national education policy was felt when Congress MP Siddheshwar Prasad criticised the government for lacking a vision and philosophy for education in the country. In the same year, the government had appointed a **17-member Education Commission**, headed by the then **UGC Chairperson D S Kothari**, to draft a national education policy, for uniform and coordinated nation-wide education policy in India. On the basis of recommendations by the commission, Parliament passed the **first education policy in 1968**. The **second National Education Policy got passed in 1986**, under the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi; it got **revised in 1992** when P V Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister.

Key highlights

Higher Education

- Opening up of **Indian higher education to foreign universities**,
- **Dismantling** of the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** and the **All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)**,
- Introduction of a four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate programme with multiple exit options, and
- **Discontinuation** of the **M Phil programme**.
- Phasing out of all institutions offering single streams & that all universities and colleges must aim to become **multidisciplinary by 2040**.
- Top Global Institutions have been encouraged to open campuses in India.
- The policy aims to increase **Gross Enrolment Ratio** in Higher Education to 50 percent by 2035.

School Education

- Making board exams “easier” by reducing the syllabus to retain “core essentials” and thrust on “experiential learning and critical thinking”.
- Restructuring of the 10+2 system of school education, into “5+3+3+4” design corresponding to the age groups **3-8 years (foundational stage)**, **8-11 (preparatory)**, **11-14 (middle)**, and **14-18 (secondary)**.
- This will bring **early childhood education** (also known as pre-school education for children of ages 3 to 5) under the ambit of **formal schooling**.
- The pre-school children should also get benefitted from the **mid-day meal programme**.
- Students until Class 5 should be taught in their **mother tongue** or **regional language**.
- In government schools there will be focus on **foundational literacy and numeracy**, **free breakfasts** being added to free lunches.



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- **Vocational education** along with **internships** will be provided to students from Class 6 onwards.

When NEP guidelines got implemented?

- The policy is meant to **transform the education system by 2040**.
- Some proposals will be implemented immediately, for example the Ministry of Human Resource Development will transform into the **Ministry of Education**.
- Firstly, from the 2020-21 academic year onwards the four-year undergraduate degrees with multiple entry-exit options will be introduced in the **20 IoEs** (Institute of Excellence), while other institutes will continue with the existing three-year degree courses.
- The existing M.Phil students can continue till the completion of their degree, although new admissions for the programme will not be accepted.
- The **National Testing Agency** will introduce a pilot version of the common entrance test by December 2020, which will be used for admission to all IoEs and central universities in 2021.
- Some Indian Institutes of Technology are working on developing the technical structure of the **Academic Credit Bank**, which will also be established by December, and become applicable to all new students joining central universities next year.
- The **National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission** which is to be implemented by 2025 will be launched by the end of this year.
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will introduce the curricular framework for the new school structure, including early childhood care, by the next academic year.

Significance

- Many children took **education as a burden** on them which resulted in a large population, which is well-educated, but most of what they have read, is not useful for them.
- So, the NEP seeks to change this approach by bringing a systematic reform in India's education system and attempts to transform both **Intent and Content of education**.
- NEP focuses on **Learning, Research and Innovation** to make the school, college and university experience: Fruitful, Broad-based and one that guides to one's natural passions.
- The emphasis on interdisciplinary study will ensure the focus is on what the student wants to learn rather than what the student is expected to do by the society.
- The national education policy emphasizes on creating **job creators** rather than job seekers. That is, in a way an attempt to bring reform in our mindset and in our approach.
- This will benefit Indian youth in getting world class exposure and opportunities, and help them prepare for global competition as well.
- This will also help in building **world-class institutions** in India, making India a hub of global education.

Criticism



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- The government has yet to finalise the draft Higher Education Commission of India bill which has been languishing in the ministry for over a year.
- The COVID-19 and lockdown has created a funding crunch for the government (the 1968 NEP was also handicapped by a shortage of funds) and the provision of free breakfasts can only be considered in the next academic year if a budget allocation is made to cover it.
- The process of converting affiliated colleges into degree granting autonomous institutions and then further into fully fledged universities is estimated to take at least 15 years, as the Centre will have to provide financial assistance for this purpose.
- The Ministry feels that an increase in government funding of education to 6% of GDP will be sufficient to cover the financial implications of the NEP.
- However, such an increase in funding has been proposed but not achieved for the last half-century.
- The proposal to make the mother tongue the medium of instruction till Class 5, which has stirred up the fiercest debates, is dependent on State governments. This proposal is criticised by various states like Tamil Nadu.

Way Forward

- In a federal system, any educational reform can be implemented only with support from the States, and the Centre has the giant task of building a consensus on the many ambitious plans.
- The idea of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council as an apex control organisation is bound to be resented by States.
- The centre should convince the states regarding the establishment of a national body for aptitude tests.
- The deadline to achieve universal literacy and numeracy by 2025 should be a top priority as a goal that will crucially determine progress at higher levels.



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