

SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY

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THE PROCESS OF POLICY FORMULATION

I. Access to the consultations:

A distinction between consultations to obtain a feedback of experiences and concerns around education and policy formulation needs to be made. The feedback from various civil society organisations of conducting consultations at the village and community levels highlight critical issues of representation of voices of the marginalised. Women, people from disadvantaged castes and tribes, economically weak households and other marginalised are unable to voice their opinions. It is mostly the dominant social groups and individuals who are in the position to influence the discussions. Conducting large group discussions in a democratic and participatory ethos also takes time and training of those engaged in carrying out these consultations. Since the range of participants in the field has increased substantively in the past decades, ensuring representations of multiple voices has become much more challenging.

II. Aggregation of grass roots opinions:

How would the varied ideas emerging from the consultations be given the shape of recommendations, who will select and screen the ideas and then work them into the policy is not clear.

III. Short time-span:

April to the end of 2015 is not adequate to hold grass roots consultations and framing policy in a meaningful way in a vast and diverse country like India. Because the goal of the government is to democratize the policy framing process, the time frame must be extended at least by a year.

IV. Going beyond grassroots opinions:

There are asymmetries on the ground in information and understanding of policy matters. Thus, further discussion and deliberation is necessary to understand, represent and address the problems and challenges of education. The outcomes of this present process should therefore be seen only as an attempt to map the concerns in education, which can be a feedback for the assessment of the context in which the policy recommendations may be deliberated. That is, the document emerging from the current grass roots consultations should represent diverse views and experiences and used as a key resource for the draft framework for further consultations at all the levels. Formulation of effective and desirable policy recommendations will require academic and research inputs as well. A national committee with academics and experienced practitioners from the field should mediate the final policy recommendations.

THE VISION FOR EDUCATION

I. Continuities and dis-continuities with existing and/or past policies:

A policy design cannot be a-historical, just as existing education scenario is shaped by historical and contemporary factors. A thorough review of the earlier policies, their vision, perspectives, recommendations and impact is necessary in order to identify continuities, gaps and areas for reform. The new policy must thus be based on the assessment of what has been achieved and not achieved and an identification of core priorities set against a future vision.

II. Missing a holistic vision of education:

The information in the public domain does not present a vision or a holistic imagination of the larger goals of education. The goals for each stage from early childhood, to elementary to senior secondary should be seen in continuity and planned in relation to each other. The latter transitions where drop outs are significant is particularly relevant for marginalised communities and girls.

III. Missing the rights perspective:

The neglect of the rights perspective in particular is a major lacuna in the policy enunciations. This vision is essential to reflect the critical role education plays in ensuring democracy and social justice. The policy should build its vision on the conception of education as a right of every child as has been pronounced in the 86th Constitutional Amendment and the RTE Act that followed.

Based on a consultation held at Ambedkar University in which the following participated: Ajay Kumar Singh, Anita Rampal, Anjali Mody, Gaurav Sharma, Gunjan Sharma, John Kurrien, Kiran Bhatta, Kumkum Roy, Malini Ghose, Namita Ranganathan, Rukmini Banerjee, Shyam Menon, Sunita Singh & Venita Kaul

IV. Missing a social science perspective:

As a field of study as well as a perspective, social science is in the margins of the themes and questions, and thrust of the NEP. This foretells a missing link with the perspective and core values that social science engenders: social context, critical enquiry and democracy. Integration of the social science perspective and due weightage to social sciences as school subjects is therefore a must.

V. Missing major contemporary concerns:

The major concerns in the existing policy and related frameworks in education of child-centered approaches to education do not appear in the focal concerns stated in the policy goals.

VI. Weak equity concerns:

In the policy design, the concerns of equity have been relegated to one theme, “Enabling Inclusive Education” (and have been mentioned in Theme 6 concerning accelerating rural literacy). Equity has become synonymous with measuring access, which is a very limited reading of the concept. This does not represent the now acknowledged inseparability of equity from all aspects of the provision of quality education. The classroom contexts have become more challenging given the increase in enrollments and diversity. These have substantively implicated equity and quality in classroom, school and educational contexts. Quality and equity in learning must therefore be imagined in unity with each other, within specific social and education contexts not as binaries, or out of context.

ACCOUNTING FOR IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES**I. Implementation bottlenecks, including resource constraints:**

There is a need for acknowledgment of the resource requirements for meeting basic goals, and of the governance reforms required to push through the education objectives. As policies have in the past floundered at the implementation stage, it would be important to address those as well.

II. A clear statement of central and state goals reflecting the increasingly assertive Federal structure of government:

The federal structure of India must be kept in mind while formulating a National Policy as education is a concurrent

subject. A clear delineation of focus areas for the Centre and a suggestive list for the states would help set policy priorities at different levels. Recognition of the same is not evident in either the themes or the process being adopted. What would be the core elements that federation would offer? How much autonomy will the state governments have? How will the NEP influence the policies of the individual states?

A FEW SPECIFIC ISSUES**I. Learning: Quality and Equity:**

- The various themes for policy consultations set out by the MHRD suggest that learning outcomes are being used as the primary indicators for quality. Learning is in fact a broader concept in which the process of learning and the learner’s experience are equally important. However, since there are different perspectives in the domain, with one perspective critiquing the learning outcomes as narrowing the curricular and educational aims and the other highlighting its utility for quality, there is a need for greater research and discussion on what constitutes learning, how it may or may not be assessed or measured and how to address issues of equity within these frames. Due to these ambiguities and debates, it would be fair to propose steps in the direction of a more informed and research-based deliberation on the matter of learning, before using any one particular perspective, to the exclusion of others. Section 29 of the RtE Act, should guide such research and discussions.
- Assessment indicators, that facilitate teachers to work with children in the classroom context, need to be developed. But these are not desirable for ranking children or schools, or for failing or passing, especially at the elementary level.
- The No Detention Policy of RtE, which includes assessment but excludes the pass-fail binary, that is being rejected on the grounds that it is responsible for falling quality, needs a thorough research based examination.
- The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation is a more comprehensive and robust system of improving learning at multiple levels, keeping needs and talents of all children in mind. The feedback of teachers on the challenges in administering CCE should be taken so as to further facilitate its implementation.

- The continuum of learning: Early years (0-6) are most critical to enable children to learn better. Similarly transition from each stage to another is pertinent in shaping the progress of a child. A fragmented policy planning for each stage will not lead to quality and equity. Recommendations for learning and assessments across school stages (from pre-school to senior secondary level and beyond) need to be synchronized and visualized cumulatively – if quality and equity are to be ensured.

II. Early Childhood Care and Education Level (ECCE):

- 0 to 6 years is the period of most rapid growth and development. Research shows that provision of ECCE leads to better learning and retention at school level.
- ECCE encompasses the inseparable elements of care, health, nutrition, play and early learning within a protective and enabling environment. The focus of NEP consultation document on child health should therefore be broadened beyond to include education for early years. It should aim to extend RtE to ECCE as well.
- Separate ministries formulate the policies for ECCE and school education and this leads to severing of links between the two. Planning for ECCE and school education should be done in a synchronized fashion.

III. Quality in Teacher Education (TE):

- The policy reform in TE based on Justice Verma Commission (JVC) 2012 has a comprehensive framework for ensuring quality in TE. It should form the basis for further planning.

- Planning for the domain should be based on technical inputs. Grass roots consultations will not have much utility for TE.
- The paucity of data & research (both quantitative & qualitative) for policy planning on TE needs to be addressed.
- Steps towards enhancing the professional status & autonomy of teachers are urgently needed if quality of teaching-learning is to be improved. Research evidence indicates that performance linked accountability measures do not enhance quality. Teacher accountability needs to be integrated with concrete steps towards teachers' professional autonomy.
- Administrative load on teachers and their work conditions need to be reviewed with a view to facilitate teachers to focus on teaching-learning.
- The hierarchies within the teacher cadre & the anomalies between teacher qualifications, recruitment rules & teacher salaries need to be examined & corrected by various states.
- Quality upgradation of in-service training & on-site support to teachers is needed.
- To ensure quality, in-service training should be planned in the modality of continuous professional development that is increasingly linked to & provided by higher education institutions.