

Let's Teach Us a Lesson



Azim Premji

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 will be truly transformative for Indian education. And since education is one of the most important processes in the development of individuals and society, it will be transformational for India.

I have been involved with education for about 20 years—from extensive on-the-ground work with government schools in some of the most disadvantaged parts of the country, to matters of curricula, teaching programmes and research focused on education. All this work is in close collaboration with relevant governments. We have also collaborated with scores of civil society institutions, as well as outstanding educationists with deep expertise.

NEP responds almost completely to the 'policy wishlist' that almost everyone in education, including the entire range of organisations and institutions that we have dealt with, would have had. I know, that is strong state-

ment, but I think it is true. The credit must go very significantly to Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan and the team that prepared the draft of the NEP in 2019, on which NEP 2020 is based. GoI also deserves equal credit, for backing this bold and transformative policy.

The policy and its highlights have been much written and talked about. I will not dwell on them, aside from mentioning that I am truly heartened by the fact that the policy explicitly states that the aim of education must be the development of a society and individuals, with deep commitment to our constitutional values. While the development of the policy and its Cabinet approval are very important—and absolutely indispensable—we still have a long journey ahead.

The implementation of this policy must be as well done as the policy itself. Here are five things that could determine effective implementation:

- NEP explicitly commits to raising public expenditure to 6% of GDP. Without doubt, this is going to be the most important determinant of the implementation. As the Kasturirangan Committee draft had wisely suggested, this increase in public expenditure may be effected over a period of time. However, in the very first year, the trend of increase must be significant enough to signal the full backing of the government to this policy.

- The kinds of transformative chang-



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Now, the tricky bit

es that the policy spells out will, without doubt, face stiff resistance from multiple quarters. This will include many powerful institutions and individuals who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. The subsequent success of the implementation will depend on whether some of the toughest actions are taken within the first two years or not.

Illustratively, the total overhaul of regulation in higher education and the redesign of its institutional architecture, the commitment to shut down the hundreds of teacher education institutions—which are nothing more than 'degree-selling shops'—and the commitment to equalise the compensation of teachers across primary to secondary school, so that there is no incentive to leave primary for secondary. If the most difficult actions are not taken early enough, the momentum generated by the proclamation of this excellent policy will be lost.

- The quality of some of the most important early actions will determine the trajectory of the long-term impact of NEP. So, the very best of expertise must be devoted immediately to these matters. For example, the National Curricular Framework (NCF) that is to be developed by 2021, must be a substantial improvement on the NCF of 2005, which, in itself, was very good. Another example is the legislative and legal acumen required, for the imagination and establishment of the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). Another one is ensuring that teacher education moves to a four-year degree into our best multidisciplinary institutions.

- GoI must ensure that this becomes a truly collective national endeavour. The state governments, irrespective of which political party is in power, should be fully engaged. As must be the entire range of individuals, organisations and institutions, across the public sector and civil society.

- Most importantly, the real spirit of the policy must be maintained in every action. This includes a deep commitment to education as a social-human process, the importance of the culture of institutions and the system, the centrality of the teacher, the clarity that quality follows equity—and not vice versa—empowerment and autonomy, and an unflinching commitment to public education.

NEP 2020 can, indeed, energise India's quest to develop a just, humane and vibrant society. From now on, it will all depend on the implementation.

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