

Decoding the National Education Policy 2020, Yearbook Article 2023

Our dream at NPS/NAFL is to realise the goals, expectations, and special aspirations of every student in our institutions. Our school environment has been envisioned to tap student potential, foster curiosity, leadership, and entrepreneurial zest so it ultimately feeds positively into the societies we live in.

India aspires to be a global power – to have a strong voice on the world stage. To realise this broader dream, the Indian government is focussed on building a more competitive workforce, which is contemporary, innovative, adaptive and adept in critical thinking and advanced technology. In a continuously transforming world, especially in the sphere of knowledge, with the emergence of cutting-edge technologies such as big data, AI and machine learning, jobseekers need to be proficient not just in Math or Computer Science but be skilled in coding and have multidisciplinary abilities across the Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences. Climate change challenges and pandemic outbreaks require collaboration in research and problem-solving to create solutions along with more advanced nations. The 21st century new-age learner needs multiple skill sets to be able to engage in a rapidly changing global ecosystem and yet, he or she should be inextricably linked to the rich tapestry of cultures and traditions of India.

To create a young workforce with a global mind-set, the Indian government has decided to reboot the country's education system by releasing a New Education Policy (NEP). This document contains the bold vision and framework of a new, robust learning system, which lays emphasis on 'how to learn' rather than what to learn; and enables technology focus in teaching and learning among other revolutionary aspects. Unarguably, the NEP will be a game-changer in the field of education when it is completely implemented. As Dr. K. Kasturirangan, the chairperson of the NEP Drafting Committee says, 'I truly believe that as this policy gets implemented over the next 20 years, it will transform India, through transforming education. By 2040, this policy will make our education system one of the best in the world and prepare our students for the global workforce.' Truly, if this policy is implemented with its 'light and tight' regulatory framework in its entirety, our education system so dependent on rote learning, with its fixation on exams and marks, will be completely upended.

It is difficult to fault any of the principles laid out in the NEP 2020. As educationists who have been in the field for more than 60 years, we acknowledge the spirit behind this major effort, which will overhaul the curriculum by visibly reducing the syllabus and encouraging experiential learning and critical thinking. The policy's proposals to create an enabling environment to teach students soft skills like communication, creativity, leadership, problem-

solving and teamwork, are encouraging and commendable. We at NPS/NAFL, have been honing these skills in our students to prepare them for a new age, tech-driven workplace. We know we will be further enabled with this progressive new curriculum and assessment methods recommended by the NEP.

One of the key areas to be impacted in schools will be the re-configuring of classes into a new 5+3+3+4 structure. Since it involves learning and teaching keeping in mind the developmental needs and capacities of students at each stage. Schools will have to be prepared for the accompanying changes in pedagogy and curriculum. The emphasis will be on laying a basic strong foundation in children in the early classes – to repeat an old phrase, to catch them young and teach them ‘how to learn’. A skill that will stand them in good stead all through their years of schooling.

The early education period comprising Nursery, LKG, UKG, and classes 1 and 2 will have a more informal, flexible and play activity based instructional approach with focus on foundational Literacy and Numeracy. Our own Early Years centres at NPS/NAFL have well-equipped early childhood units, and now, the play-way, child-centred approach advocated by the government, will provide more time to nurture the creativity and social-emotional development of the child. The other key principle that stands out in the policy is giving the highest priority to achieving foundational Literacy and Numeracy for all students by Grade 3.

It is encouraging that this line of thinking continues into the next stage of schooling, what the NEP refers to as the Preparatory Stage, which covers class 3 to class 5. Here too, though the child will move into a more formal structure, the classroom will be more ‘interactive’. This thrust, we are proud to state, has been the NPS way for decades. Our children have been, and will continue to be encouraged to study through a discovery approach, which involves learning by doing, exploration of the environment and manipulation of objects and materials and active problem solving. This method should result in good learning outcomes in early classes in contrast to what has been revealed by several academic surveys conducted by NCERT and NGOs like Pratham.

As stated at the outset, at the heart of our School Vision is the burning hope that we build knowledgeable, lifelong learners and leaders who positively impact and contribute as global citizens. The NEP goals of hands-on experiential learning, multi-disciplinary study combined with a push for vocational education and flexibility in course choices in the Middle and Secondary stages, is also designed at providing students a holistic, international education. The policy shows tremendous foresight in fostering inter-disciplinary learning through a new, comprehensive curriculum to be designed by NCERT. It will bridge the conventional rigid separation between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, and between

vocational and academic streams. Additionally, vocational education will be introduced from class 6 with internships and this will fundamentally and dramatically alter the way young people view daily practical tasks. How many children know how to sew a button or change a car tyre?! Keeping this in mind, a useful exercise would be to bring adult professionals into the school world who share insights on real world professions and challenges. Schools can grow design thinking and problem-solving habits in their students that mirror business thinking and develop student voice and experience.

What is more crucial is that the current 'high-stakes' class 10 and 12 Board exams will be redesigned to test 'higher-order skills', such as 'analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity'. (This mirrors our Cambridge programme at NAFL which has ensured our students are highly successful in their higher education overseas as well as in their diverse career paths.) It will be a more objective rather than a subjective assessment, with exams and marks no longer being the sole determiner of a student's intelligence and capabilities. The introduction of a 360-degree Holistic Progress Card to track student progress in achieving learning outcomes; with a focus on continuous internal assessment and testing core competencies in a subject, may reduce the stress around learning and exams and, hopefully, make tuition culture obsolete.

The reforms around the Board exams aims to free students of angst and anxiety, which has always been a source of concern. The introduction of continuous internal assessment and a holistic progress card may bring down the pressure to chase high marks. By allowing a student to take another shot at the Board exam, the NEP gives a student a second chance to better their academic performance. This aspect must be applauded. We have to wait and see how exams in classes 3, 5 and 8 play out, since that may turn into an additional burden for students.

NEP 2020's thrust on vocational education offers no roadmap yet, on how it will be incorporated into the curriculum. Will it require schools to invest in curricular, pedagogical and infrastructural requirements to run these courses? We will have to wait for more clarity on this front.

The only red flag is a missing Action Plan on how these far-reaching changes will unfold. For example, there has been a lot of conversations on introducing the child's mother tongue/local language or regional language as the medium of instruction up to class 5. However, Dr. Kasturirangan has clarified that this feature simply refers to the existing three-language formula and that no language will be imposed on students or schools.

In fact, the policy is generating discussion on the cognitive benefits of learning multiple languages for children. And, how children in the early years learn better when taught in their

mother tongue. The policy lays a lot of stress on this point and encourages teachers to be bilingual even to teach English, especially if the majority of children hail from non-English speaking backgrounds.

For multilingual education to be successful, however it has to be accompanied by pedagogical changes, new books and trained teachers, who can deal with several languages in the classroom and who can teach in the child's mother tongue. Also, considering the multiplicity of languages and dialects in India, it may be difficult to zero in on the one that can be used as a medium of instruction in a particular area.

It is heartening to note a key area in which NEP shines, Ed-tech. At NPS/NAFL, we have invested greatly in technology, even before Covid pushed us into digital classrooms. Our Smart Boards seamlessly integrate audio-visual teaching tools and dynamically enhance our students' educational experience. The policy contains some potentially great ideas such as the use of adaptive software to provide tailored and flexible lessons, blended learning, and the use of AI software to track student progress. The conceptualisation of the National Educational Technology Forum to brainstorm on the deployment of technology to improve the systemic performance of the entire educational system sounds quite promising.

The ambitious new education system places teachers at the heart of these fundamental reforms. Rightfully so. It promises to secure teachers' livelihoods and ensure their dignity and autonomy, but it also lays down a lot of quality control and accountability. It is likely that teachers can now focus on delivering a learner centric pedagogy without the pressure of having to complete a heavy, text-based syllabus with exam pressures hanging over their heads.

Teachers will, no doubt, have to continually challenge themselves because they will not just have to adopt a new curriculum and incorporate new teaching methods, they will have to be comfortable and master sharper teaching technologies. Not to forget, they have to teach in multiple languages too. NEP, however, reiterates that teachers will be given ample scope and opportunities to train, with access to continuous professional development.

The policy acknowledges that 'the high respect for teachers and the high status of the teaching profession must be restored so as to inspire the best to enter the teaching profession'. It plans to revamp the process of teacher recruitment, their continuous professional development, working environments and service conditions to ensure the best enter the system. This is intrinsically what we believe in at NPS/NAFL. Our TISB Teacher Training Academy has pioneered exciting work for aspiring teachers, newly qualified teachers, and experienced teachers, incorporating the latest advances in educational research and best teaching practices.

Another highly positive aspect of NEP is that it aims to involve community and alumni through volunteer efforts to promote foundational literacy with one-on-one tutoring; extra help

sessions, teaching support and guidance for educators, career guidance and mentoring to students, etc. In this regard, active and healthy senior citizens, school alumni, literate volunteers, retired scientists, educators, and local community members will be roped in.

The futuristic blueprint has over 100 action points, but we will be able to completely comprehend the changes only when it begins to be implemented in phases. We can probably expect the introduction of the new curricular framework, including the ECCE, to be available by the next academic year, while we await information on the redesigned Board examinations.

To make the wheels of this inclusive, and transformative system roll in a synchronous manner, to make it work and succeed, we must get future ready with the ethos of the programme and play our parts with integrity and professionalism.

Team NPS/Team NAFL heartily welcomes NEP 2020. We cannot wait to shape our empowering ecosystem anew!

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