

New Education Policy 2016

Skilling the gaping holes

The New Education Policy can help bridge the skills gap by making certain skills an integral part of the curricula. It must also make practical training mandatory



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REVIVAL and rejuvenation is the primary objective of the laboriously drafted New Education Policy (NEP) 2016. The Indian higher education landscape, plagued with its own set of woes, needs a paradigm shift and policy push to mark its presence in the global arena. The existing state of affairs of these learning spaces is not a hush-hush tale; colossal vacancies in teaching positions, little emphasis on research with skewed funding and questionable employability of higher education graduates is staring at us in the face, with only 43% of the current youth being considered into the fully employable category.

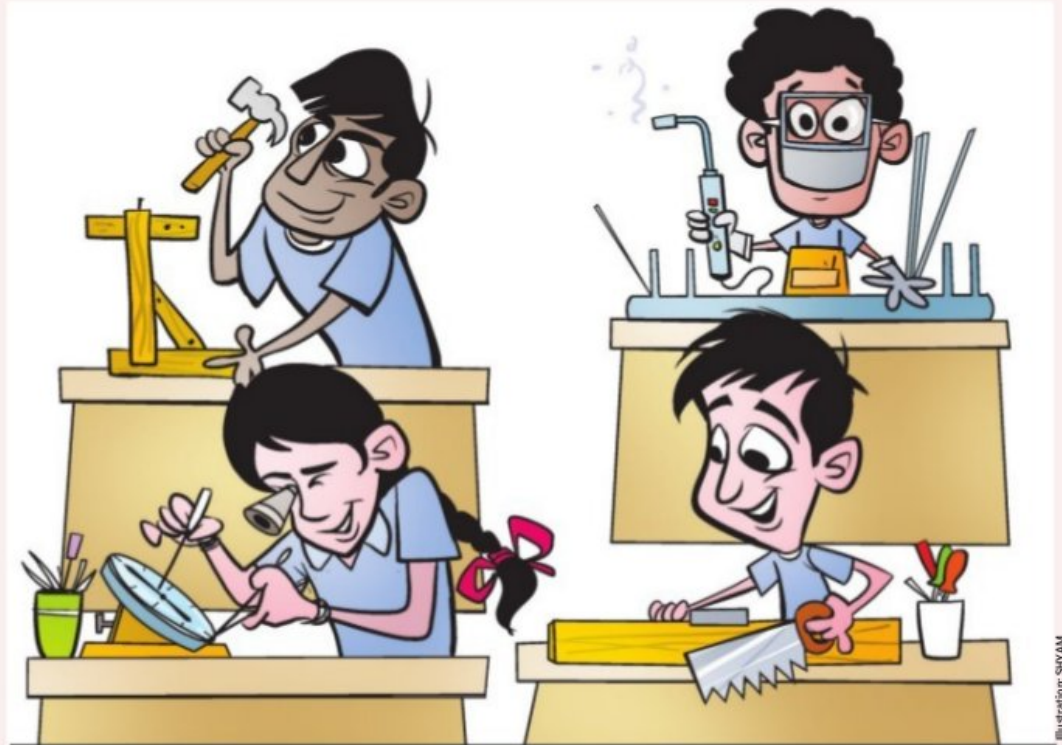
The last decade has seen debates, discussions and deliberations on the demographic dividend the country has with the youngest working population in the world. Numbers support this growth—India is gearing up to fuel 60% of the global labour growth in the coming times. The demand for quality higher education and the subsequent jobs is set to go north, with the UNDP figures predicting it to touch a billion by 2050.

But these burgeoning numbers will serve no purpose if they do not obtain the skills required to match the global work standards; the country is still struggling with a huge pool of low-skilled workforce. What is needed is a drastic change in the entire education paradigm to make it more suitable to the changing times. An effort has been made in this direction by the proposed draft of the NEP 2016.

Employability and current quality of education have emerged as the core concern in this policy doctrine, and rightly so. With technological advancements bringing about colossal changes in the work environment, businesses all over are seeking workers with specific skills to harness this change to its maximum capacity. We need sincere efforts to make strong and robust linkages between higher education and skill-based vocational education.

Work in progress

Led by former cabinet secretary TSR Subramanian, the Committee for Evolution of New Education Policy has recommended a slew of measures to take the baton of Indian higher education further. Through the two-volume report of 200 pages containing nearly 90 recommendations, significant interventions have been suggested. The need to overhaul the education system has



I have often maintained that the perception of educated parents that everyone had to be either a doctor or an engineer—a hangover to the mindset of the 1960s and 1970s—has tragically hamstrung efforts at skill building at its most important stage, during school. But times are changing and the realisation has crept in that school-level skilling can lead to satisfying, lucrative careers. In fact, CBSE now offers some 50 vocational courses and the school management is encouraging students to discover original or innovative talents in themselves. But there is need for more to check the increasing drop-out rate at the level of primary education.

The NEP cites that though there has been an increase in GER, a large number of children drop out of school before completing primary education. Numbers depict how four out of 10 children enrolled in Class 1 leave school before finishing Class 7. The NEP has been entrusted with the challenge of going beyond the quantity and resolve the qualitative issues of the Indian education system. This move will allow more skill companies to venture into these areas with a curbed drop-out rate.

The perfect blend

A number of recommendations by the committee point towards the much-required amendments to the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. With an extension being made to private unaided religious/minority schools in the clause, providing free education to children from economically weaker sections as the number of schools claiming religious or linguistic minority status

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fund will support tuition fees, learning material and living expenses for about 10 lakh students every year, a pull factor that will draw more and more students into the education arena.

That is not all. With an overarching view to consolidate the education system, the draft has proposed merging the small, non-viable schools, challenging the RTE Act on the neighbourhood schools for children between Class 1 and Class 5. These amendments, made with an aim to look at area-specific guidelines instead of a nationwide framework, give a breather to institutions working in poor neighbourhoods, who were facing closure threats despite their commendable work.

The bigger picture

It is important to look at outcomes of an initiative than be restricted by parameters. The amendments proposed in the RTE Act suggest that instead of parameters such as infrastructure, the government should look at "learning

make students more employable. We have to come out of the theoretical mindset in curriculum design and focus more on dissemination of usable skills to make our students job-ready. Improvement in teaching-learning methods, periodic and enhanced industry interactions, and emphasis on practical aspects of subjects are a few steps that can be initiated by individual institutions. The main challenge is to create an education system that promotes and ensures continuous learning.

Even as the student skills are worked upon, we have to focus on the number and skill-sets of teachers. With over 7.7 lakh teaching posts lying vacant across central and state government schools, the existing ones are burdened to deal with a large number of students, compromising on the quality of teaching. As suggested by the committee, a PhD for teachers at undergraduate level may not be necessary. Instead, the pedagogic merit should be taken into consideration. To curtail the shortage of teachers, it has been proposed to initiate integrated teacher training courses after 10+2, funded by the state, to keep interested candidates close to the profession.

The demographic dividend, if not given the treatment of skills, may simply turn into a demographic disaster. The imbalance between too few skilled workers and fewer jobs for the medium and low-skilled workforce is pointing towards the impending disaster. The NEP can help bridge this gap by making skills an integral part of the curricula and make practical training mandatory in the education curriculum. These recommendations have come at a time

been gaining momentum. Against the 4.9% global average of government spending as a percentage of GDP, India has only been spending about 3.5% of its GDP to impart education to its children and youth. There is a startling disconnect between the GER, which is going north, and the quality of education in terms of student takeaways.

has increased tremendously aids the spread of the basic right.

Widening the ambit of the policy, it has been suggested to set up a National Fellowship Fund to support students from economically-weaker sections, for which students will be selected through a separate exam for a National Talent Scholarship Scheme after Class 12. This

outcomes" and amend the RTE Act. The report has suggested applying the infrastructure norms for recognition of private schools to government schools as well, without any discrimination.

The government must also look to institute suitable changes in the NEP to cater to the burgeoning need of joining skill development with curriculum, to

when the entire education ecosystem is undergoing a paradigm shift, and if followed and implemented in the right earnest and spirit, it can reap the best out of the demographic dividend the nation has been banking upon.

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