

# How NEP 2020 – Changing the landscape of learning in India

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*(32 minutes read)*

India's education sector is rapidly evolving as the world scrambles to come to grips with new social realities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. To become a true 'knowledge hub', India urgently needs to cultivate innovative and advanced skills.

With this ambition in mind, the National Education (NEP) has been designed to envision new learnings in education and skill development as a continually evolving process. The NEP presents a progressive approach towards much-needed reforms in education, an extension of the system introduced after independence.

## A convergence of traditional and modern formats

The NEP draws a delicate balance between India's traditional models of learning and futuristic, modern formats. While talking about advancements such as big data, machine learning (ML) and artificial thinking (AI), the NEP also pays tribute to India's heritage, and aims to nurture and enhance it further.

Taking inspiration from historical centres of learning such as Takshila and Nalanda, the policy emphasises the importance of a liberal education, recommending a seamless blend of arts, humanities, physical fitness, and languages, as well as science and mathematics. Holistic development and contextualisation are at the heart of traditional Indian education, and the NEP attempts to bring these values to the fore.

## School education—focus on experiential learning

School education has always been a contentious subject in India, with wide-ranging and often disparate views on matters such as the medium of instruction, importance of life skills, efficacy of exams, and availability of resources. The NEP recommends universalisation of Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) and introduces a 5+3+3+4 format, emphasising foundational numeracy and literacy at the end of initial five years (equivalent to current Grade 3). The policy moves away from rote learning and focusses, instead, on internalisation and experiential learning.

Assessments in schools too would change drastically. The policy suggests formative, competency-based assessments that test higher-order skills such as conceptual clarity, analysis and critical thinking. This, in our view, could be the single most important contribution to reforms in the education system. Grades 10 and 12, will also have summative assessments and bi-yearly exams in an academic year—this would essentially reduce the unhealthy and obsessive focus on board exams.

Shifting the emphasis from core subjects, the NEP also recommends the introduction of modern subjects, such as coding and compulsory vocational education, from the sixth standard onwards. The policy also sets

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up a Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education zones to support economically and socially disadvantaged groups. By providing flexibility to students in choosing subjects, the NEP breaks down the siloes that exist between Arts and Sciences, curricular and extracurricular subjects, or vocational and academic streams.

## **Higher Education—consolidation and innovation**

The NEP underlines the need to consolidate and transform higher education institutions into large multi-disciplinary institutions. There is a clear direction to make higher education more learner-driven and learner-centric – a marked shift from the institution centric and instructor driven model that is currently practised. This shift will help integrate a fragmented higher education system and create vibrant learning ecosystems by increasing resource efficiency and developing globally competitive institutes.

The policy introduces a slew of measures to encourage students to pursue higher education. For instance, it expands the options available to students by giving them the flexibility to not only choose their subjects across disciplines but also to opt-out of courses at any point. Other progressive measures for colleges and universities include four-year undergraduate degrees, multiple entry and exit, banking of credits, phasing out of affiliated colleges. As per the policy, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be the single apex body and greater autonomy will be provided to educational institutions.

To bring uniformity, the National Testing Agency (NTA) will be set up to help students prepare for university education—especially those from economically-weak backgrounds. The recommendation to converge general and vocational education was long overdue from the perspective of increasing employability of students. This will help remove the stigma of vocational education and ensure students focus on life skills from early stages.

## **A missed opportunity?**

While the NEP is forward looking and detailed one important area it does not adequately address is the issue of private sector participation. At a broad level, it talks about the public good and suggests philanthropy as a means of private sector involvement.

With the growing demand for education over the next few decades, government is expected to have difficulties in funding additional growth requirements.

The NEP could have presented an acceptable format that would provide an enabling environment for well-meaning private sector investment and participation in the education journey.

India has the opportunity to become a global destination for learning, similar to the emergence of the U.S. as an epicentre for learning in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The right patronage and enabling regulations would enhance the attractiveness of Indian universities.

## **Conclusion**

The NEP is disruptive and will have far-reaching changes in the way key players in the Indian education sector are aligned. Across early childhood, school education, university and higher formats, as well as the vocational education, players need to re-examine their strategies, investments and operations to be successful in the future.

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In conclusion, the NEP is a learner-centric policy which focuses on experiential learning, vocational education, and the transformation of higher education institutions. The policy puts India on track to achieve Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, by highlighting inclusive, equitable, and quality education that would promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. With the right implementation, this policy could help mould a new India, an emerging hub for global education, where the youth are empowered with the right knowledge and skillsets to succeed in the dynamic marketplace.

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