India’s New Education Policy: A Case of Indigenous Ingenuity Contributing to the Global Knowledge Economy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal:</th>
<th>Journal of Knowledge Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript ID</td>
<td>JKM-11-2020-0840.R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript Type</td>
<td>Real Impact Viewpoint Articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords:</td>
<td>Economy, Education, India, NEP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
India’s New Education Policy: A Case of Indigenous Ingenuity Contributing to the Global Knowledge Economy?

India as the world’s second largest growing economy and large contributor to the global knowledge economy is an important region that the world is dependent upon. Further, India as a unique and diverse country, is home to two thirds of the world’s population, and possesses a distinct culture (Pereira and Malik, 2013; 2015a; 2015b; Malik and Pereira, 2016). In recent years, India was in need of a new direction and strategy to sustain itself going forward, especially in the education sector, which is the base of its knowledge domain, and this was further important in order to hold on to its global competitive advantage.

India has a long history of education, innovation and knowledge creation and dissemination, with the world’s first university established in Takshashila in 700 B.C., with more than 10,500 students from around the world studied more than 60 subjects there. Aryabhatta, the Indian scientist, invented the digit zero, and the value of “pi” was first calculated by the Indian Mathematician Budhayana, who also explained the concept of Pythagoras theorem. Indeed, it has been said that the traditional education system of India was “culturally and spiritually enriched and advanced” (Pandya, 2014; see also Mishra & Varma, 2019). Successive invasions often destroyed the centers of learning, though they were often re-built, and the education system repeatedly suffered. The education system inherited by independent India was set up by the British and generally designed to educate clerks who could help run British administration of India (Pandya, 2014).

Previous Indian governments have been credited with opening up of the economy and creating opportunities, but the existing government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas
Modi, is taking bold steps to ensure India surges ahead with renewed focus and vigor. The framing and launching of the new education policy is thus evidence of this strategy and plan.

This impact piece is a reflective analysis of the new education policy by five key people that represent multidimensional domains of its diverse populace. Our goal is to critically examine the policy through the lens of practicality, diversity, and access to education for all. As coauthors we originally come from different geographical regions in India, have varied backgrounds and experiences, are of different ages and hence our perspective piece here is reflective of this diversity and is inclusive. As educationists with administrative experience, we are also keenly aware of the steps needed to turn policy into practice. As such, we conclude this commentary with recommendations for key stakeholders, including (i) policy makers, (ii) educationists, and (iii) corporate leaders.

Before diving into our analysis, we would like to touch upon some very exciting features of the NEP (2020). Firstly, the ability and flexibility to choose subjects across different discipline streams; such as, Arts and Humanities, besides STEM, will be a game-changer, in our opinion. In the past, students were restricted to a particular stream that they chose after high school and were unable to switch to a different stream. This restricted them to a specific career or line of work for the rest of their careers. We strongly believe that this restriction limited the overall development of the student, while also depriving the nation of the other potential talents of the student. Next, the multilingual policy, which will provide education in the local language up to the fifth grade and possibly up to the eighth grade, will help build a stronger base for students as it will be easier for them to grasp difficult concepts. Further, the national testing conducted common entrance exam will ensure consistent standards across the country and will allow students to move across the country depending on their scores rather than choosing colleges based on connections or donations.
In addition, the emphasis on vocational training and “bagless days” will allow students to develop their personalities rather than simply rely on book knowledge, which is often deemed inadequate for employment. Finally, the fee-cap proposal and doubling the public investment in education to 6% of the country’s GDP is remarkable, as this ensures that students of all means will be able to attend college, making education accessible for all and not restricted to simply those who have the means.

As Indian-origin educationists and practitioners, the five of us are very excited to read this policy and believe that this will have a tremendous impact on the next generation of children and the future workforce of India and the globe. Indeed, one potential outcome of this policy is the possibility of attracting Indian expatriates back to the motherland (see, e.g., Varma & Tung, 2020), due to the progressive nature of the policy. In addition, we believe that the neighboring countries will also be able to benefit from studying and adopting, as relevant, key tenets of this policy in their own education systems. Finally, the impact of this change will start to be felt in the next two decades, as students emerge out of the new education system and join the workplace.

In the following sections, we highlight 7 of the key features of this policy, as identified in our discussions with key stakeholders, and discuss the impact of these policies on knowledge creation and future knowledge economy contributors (see Table 1).
1. Curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels

A major objective of the NEP 2020 is to reduce and eventually limit the dropout rates of students studying in elementary and secondary schools. Through the ‘Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan’ and the Right to Education Act (2019), India has made remarkable progress in nearly achieving 100% enrolment in elementary education. However, despite such efforts, the average annual dropout across schools has been a major issue in the Indian education system. For example, of an average enrollment of 100 students, only 70 finish school in India (The Hindu, 2019). According to the NEP (2020), the general enrollment rate for grades 6-8 was 90.9%, for grades 9-10 it is 79.3% and for grades 11-12 it is 56.5%, indicating that a major proportion of students drop out of schools after grade 8. This issue becomes even more concerning when these figures are analysed through various sections of the Indian society, such as the tribals (i.e. the Adivasis). Therefore, it is a top priority for the current Modi government to achieve 100% gross enrollment ratio from preschool to secondary level by 2030. To achieve this objective, the government will adopt a two-pronged strategy: i) invest in robust infrastructure so that all the students have access to safe and engaging education, and ii) to achieve universal participation by carefully and systematically tracking the progress of students in terms of their enrollment and also, the opportunities they have to catch-up and re-enter school in case they have fallen behind. We believe this to be a key reform as this will lay down a strong foundation in ensuring student success and the future sustainability of the Indian education system.

Further, there are other initiatives rolled out by the government. These include, first, providing hostels for students, especially for girl students, to give them the opportunity to attend the school of their choice. Second, setting up independent education centres in partnership with civil society to help disadvantaged children get back into mainstream education. And third, providing open and
distance learning (OLD) programmes for students who are unable to physically attend school, and providing after school classes for students struggling with their studies— to name a few.

2. **Equitable and inclusive education: Learning for all**

Next, the government envisions equitable and inclusive education for all. This policy rests on the principle that education is the single most important tool for achieving social equity and justice. India is a country with vast disparities and despite its emergence as leading global economy, it still lags behind when it comes to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which each and every citizen has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential. In what is believed to be a ground-breaking reform, the NEP states that the government will form a ‘Gender Inclusion Fund’ to build India’s capacity to provide equitable education for everyone (Times of India, 2020a), but especially for female students. Furthermore, the Indian government has also declared that it will focus on socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) that historically remained underrepresented in education. These include gender identities (e.g. female and transgender students), socio-cultural identities (e.g. scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (e.g. students from villages, small towns and aspirational districts), disabilities, and socio-economic conditions (e.g. migrants, low-income households, victims of child trafficking, orphans, child beggars etc.).

Clearly, the government of India is committed to providing education to every Indian citizen. In this connection, scholars have argued that the “theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism underpin the theory and practice of inclusive education” (see Al-Shammari, Faulkner, & Forlin, 2019). Given the deep emphasis on inclusive education in the policy, it is clear that the policy makers were guided by these theoretical constructs.
In addition to making education inclusive for all, the government has also suggested specific measures in the NEP that will be particularly effective in implementing this policy. For example, making textbooks available in various formats for effective learning, providing bicycles to students and organising walking groups to make schools, colleges and universities more accessible and safer. Such measures should lead to increased participation, particularly from female students, as better safety measures will be in place. Similarly, providing one-on-one tutoring, peer-mentoring, open schooling and the use of technology will ensure that students with disabilities can have full access to education. The policy also proposes that schools consider hiring more counsellors and/or psychologists to improve student attendance, engagement and learning outcomes. This is critical given that there is a severe learning crisis in India where children enrolled in primary school sometimes fail to attain even basic skills such as foundational literacy and numeracy (Firstpost, 2020). In our view, this policy and the measures outlined above will transform the educational landscape of the country as Indian education is set to become more open, diverse, inclusive, and accessible for everyone. This has major implications for the future workforce of the country as India will produce graduates that are open-minded and welcoming of those who are different. This, in turn, should push firms and employers in India to offer more equal opportunity employment (EOE) opportunities, leading to a win-win for both, the employer and the employee.

3. Towards a more holistic and multidisciplinary education

India has always been known as the land of philosophy and spirituality that has emphasised a holistic approach to learning. Some of the earliest universities in the world (e.g., Takshashila and Nalanda), were established in India. As Mark Twain noted in Following the Equator, “India is the country of a hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods.”
cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition” (1897). Not surprisingly, India has contributed to the world by drawing on its wisdom and knowledge, passed on to future generations through its ancient texts. The practice of Yoga that has now become a global institution, and the Indian medicinal system of Ayurveda are just a few examples. Keeping this tradition alive, the Modi government now wants to bring holistic education to the classroom. This will include schools, colleges (i.e. Polytechnic) and universities adopting the notion of the ‘knowledge of many arts’ (also known as liberal arts in modern times) that will have distinct Indian origins and will draw on all branches of creative human endeavours, including mathematics, science, vocational subjects, professional subjects, and soft skills (NEP, 2020). This approach links to Indian students receiving a multidisciplinary education that aims to develop all capacities of human beings – i.e. mental, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, emotional, and moral, in a holistic and integrated manner.

We are convinced that this policy will mark a new dawn for Indian education that has long emulated Western education models while ignoring its own rich traditions and heritage. For example, promoting ancient Indian languages like Sanskrit besides other foreign languages and introducing the Indian sign language (ISL) as part of the ‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’ initiative will significantly improve the communication skills of our students. Furthermore, delivering a flexible curriculum structure will promote creativity through offering a combination of subjects from diverse disciplines, as well as having access to multiple entry and exit pathways thus removing the rigidity in the current system. As Mr. Modi said, the NEP will mark a shift from the ‘burden of school bag’ to ‘experiential learning’ with focus on making ‘job creators’ instead of ‘job seekers’ in line with the aspiration of Indian youth in the 21st century (Times of India, 2020b). We hail the Prime Minister’s vision and think that this policy is a reflection of the aspirations of
the people of India in making Indian education creative, fun within a system that thrives not just on knowledge but also innovation, whilst having a distinct Indian flavour.

4. Equity and inclusion in higher education

We believe that when education is not available to all members of the society, it is not only harmful for the individual, but it also hurts the country, its economy, and its social growth. We are pleased to learn that the NEP 2020 will rigorously promote equity and inclusive education in higher education, to ensure that women, individuals with disabilities, and other ethnic minorities will have equal access to higher education. Higher education is critical for students as it gives them the relevant skills and knowledge that makes them employable and job-ready in the labour market. As a result, the government has decided to rigorously promote equity and inclusion in higher education, which we believe is a very timely and critical reform. From including SEDGs to addressing critical barriers like cost of pursuing higher education, and geographical and language barriers, this policy has been carefully designed to ensure that higher education is inclusive and available to everyone.

To successfully implement this policy, the government has proposed a range of measures that are specific to promoting equity and inclusion in higher education. For example, one, improving gender balance in admissions to higher education institutions (HEIs). Two, supporting HEIs to teach in local/Indian languages, providing scholarships for SEDGs, making the curriculum more diverse, investing in infrastructure to make buildings and facilities more accessible for individuals with disabilities, developing pathway courses for disadvantaged students, providing counselling and mentoring programs, enforcing strict ‘non-discrimination’ and ‘anti-harassment rules’ and so on. These are just some of the most important reforms that will transform the Indian education system. We believe that these seven features will not only transform the Indian education
system, but as Prime Minister Modi said, it will make India a knowledge-hub and a preferred
destination for students from around the globe to pursue higher education in divers’ streams (Times
of India, 2020c).

5. Re-imagining vocational education

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched in 2015 in the United Nation’s
publication ‘Transforming our World’ called for transformation of vocational education and
training. Indeed, vocational education was the central aspect of Goal 4 of the SDGs which seeks
to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities
for all’ (UN, 2015). We firmly believe that these carefully designed interventions will go a long in
establishing vocational educational as a means of human development. The re-envisioned policy,
which helps to bring vocational education into the mainstream (i.e. at middle and secondary school
levels with a pathway to higher education level) and envisages multi-stakeholder partnerships
among schools, higher education institutes, ITIs, polytechnics and local industry. This model
offers a much-needed thrust for the development of innovative practices of vocational education
under the aegis of National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE).
Moreover, the alignment of vocational education standards with the International Standard
Classification of Occupations maintained by the International Labour Organization will provide
the basis for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), that will help drop-out students to align their
gained practical experience with the relevant level of the framework and gain re-entry into
education again.

In the wake of a rapidly changing globalised economy and work environment, the specific
approaches to reforming vocational education in India were long overdue. We are convinced that
by positioning vocational education as a component of holistic and multidisciplinary and multi-
dimensional education, the NEP has successfully incorporated an integrated human development approach that reinforces the linkage of vocational learning to growth. This should help improve the employability and productivity of individuals, that will prove to be instrumental in effective socio-economic progress. The new calculated approach lays down a foundation for understanding the complexities of the interactions amongst education, skills and sustainable growth to explore future labour market demands in India.

In a nutshell, we believe that the renewed focus on vocational education is rightly aimed at re-imagining the Indian workforce, and the economic and social development milieu by reinforcing a human capital development focus. The new interventions have the potential to strengthen workforce development in India and move towards a well-planned integrative framework, with the assistance of relevant stakeholders, that will eventually help in sustainable growth and development of the Indian economy, in concert with socio-political balance.

6. **Online and digital education: Ensuring equitable use of technology**

The pandemic, COVID-19, arrived without much warning and enveloped the whole world within a very short time, impacting almost all sectors. Not surprisingly, the education sector took a huge hit, requiring schools and colleges worldwide to re-imagine delivery (see Zhang & Varma, 2020). In response to this and to prepare for future such events, chapter 24 of the NEP specifically addresses the issue of ensuring access to technology for all. The policy specifically lays out seven steps that will help structure the online education system in India, starting with carefully designed pilot projects, in conjunction with appropriate partners (i.e. IGNOU, IITs and NITs etc.).

There is no doubt that the National e-governance plan (NeGP) has led to innovations in public service delivery to citizens and businesses with the prime focus on the rural sector through initiatives taken by Government of India (GOI) for bridging the digital divide (e.g., *Digital India*...
initiative, National Digital Literacy Mission, Gyandoot Project, Swyam, and Internet Saathi). Of course, concentrated efforts will be needed to track the success of these initiatives and revamp the technological infrastructure and capabilities in line with the dynamic environment, and the urgent need to re-imagine and re-configure educational delivery models.

We believe the nation will need technology leadership and collaborative efforts on the part of industry, educational institutes, and village-level entrepreneurs (VLEs) to bridge the digital divide, and be able to capitalize fully on the disruptive technologies, such as AR/VR and gamification. These collaborative efforts will ensure better resourcing and training of teachers to integrate effectively new digital tools and pedagogies better, which might advance equity by cultivating effective, technology-driven educational institutes.

7. Renewed emphasis on professional education

The NEP has highlighted concerns about professional education and its efficacy in developing professionals with the ability to understand and use local knowledge, traditional knowledge, and emerging technologies while being cognizant of critical issues affecting Indian economy (i.e. declining land productivity, climate change, and food insufficiency). We believe that a closer collaboration between industry and higher education institutions has the potential to drive innovation and research in these fields. Moreover, the greater integration of different disciplines (i.e. agriculture, legal, healthcare and technical education), within the knowledge economy, will lead to a stock of ‘work-ready graduates’ that would be sufficient to drive desired improvements in India’s economic productivity and growth in coming decades.

Indeed, all the suggested efforts point towards a well-drafted action plan that will be executed by three primary stakeholders that are responsible for professional development of human capital – ‘Indian government’ (for setting education strategy and policy guidelines,
maintain appropriate infrastructures, and establish monitoring systems); ‘Employers’ (who conduct analyses of their overall work and job requirements, and manage subsequent employee performance); and ‘Educational Institutes’ (offering vocational and higher education) – with a potential to significantly contribute to human development index of India. Thus, all the mentioned initiatives for professional education in NEP puts the Indian government in the drivers’ seat signifying its role as a ‘Policy influencer’ that oversees and monitors the suggested initiatives.

While employers serve as ‘Catalysts’ who portray the role of industry centres of excellence in association with government and are responsible for knowledge-transfer partnership with educational institutes, educational institutes enact the role of ‘Facilitators’ that are instrumental in well-rounded holistic development of professionals by embracing multi-disciplinary curricula the involves critical and interdisciplinary thinking, discussion, debate, research, and innovation.

Conclusions

As we noted at the beginning, the NEP (2020) has the potential to change the educational landscape of India for the foreseeable future. Globally, education policies and practices are undergoing seismic shifts due to the continuing globalization of the world (Al’ Abri, 2011; Jones and Coleman, 2005). Interestingly, several authors have noted that corporations have a huge role to play in the success of any nation’s education policy, though they have a more direct effect in developing countries. Further, while developed nations often use their education policies to spread their message worldwide through soft diplomacy, developing nations use their education policies to help raise the standards of living for their people.

Since education and development are clearly linked, a developing nation’s (e.g., India) effort to develop has to begin with providing access to quality education for all. Some 70 years after independence, the Indian education system needed serious reform, and this bill promises to
do just that. While India produces extremely high-quality engineers, doctors, MBAs, and so on, the benefits of the education system do not always reach the whole population and are often available only to those who are lucky enough to study in the English medium, or those who are well-connected or have the means. In addition, the proliferation of private, unaccredited colleges and universities has had a detrimental effect on the quality of graduates as well as the perception of employability of these graduates. The government has regularly tried to shut down these operations through legal actions and announcements in newspapers. The new policy specifically reiterates that all education will be only through accredited institutions that will be under the purview of the UGC (University Grants Commission) and the AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education). This should help ensure that unsuspecting students and families are not fleeced by unscrupulous operators.

Indeed, this bill is perfectly suited to reduce or remove these inequities and make education accessible to all. Clearly, the potential impact of the tenets of this bill will affect the Indian workplace the most, whereby a new type of employable graduate will become the norm – one who understands the Indian ethos, the Indian culture and the Indian workplace. Without a doubt, this is the need of the hour and the law has come at just the right time. It should also be noted that the neighboring countries in the South Asian region can also benefit immensely from this bill by adopting and adapting the relevant provisions. Given the long historical and cultural connections between the India and its neighbors, this seems like a logical next step. At the beginning of his first term as Prime Minister, Mr. Modi made it a point to extend the hand of friendship to all the nations in the region. In the six years since, his government has continued to share information, technology, and other resources, as and when called upon. Indeed, India has shipped millions of doses of a vaccine developed to fight Covid-19 to Bhutan, Maldives, Sri
While some moves, such as the recent currency swap with Sri Lanka, might be seen as a short-term fix, the education bill is designed to benefit the country for decades to come, and by extension, the neighboring nations could also benefit from this comprehensive and well-thought-out plan.

We conclude by offering some future research directions for scholars, as well as recommendations for the key stakeholders, including (i) policy makers, (ii) educationists, and (iii) corporate leaders. In terms of research, scholars could study (i) the reactions of the various segments of Indian society to see how well the policy is being received and implemented. While this would make a good line of inquiry in the short run, there is tremendous potential to conduct longitudinal investigations of this policy to examine the impact of its implementation on the various target segments of society, and the extent to which the stated objectives are met.

We next offer some recommendations for the key stakeholders (see Table 2 for the complete list). First, for policy makers (i.e., government), it is important that they acknowledge and understand that this is a very ambitious policy that has set very high expectations among the general public and the other stakeholders. As such, it is critical that the government ensure that the policy is implemented fairly across the country and across all segments of society. In addition, the government should also partner with scholars to conduct research so they can track the implementation of the policy at various stages, as well as measure the level of success of various projected benefits of the NEP. Next, educationists across the nation should ensure that they implement the policy in the true spirit, while also offering feedback to the government about
the content of the policy and issues faced in its implementation. Finally, corporate executives should track the performance of those employees they hire that have been the beneficiaries of the new policy. This will help all stakeholders understand the degree to which the policy is having the desired effect. They should also offer feedback to the government at regular intervals in terms of possible changes needed, to make sure the policy stays current with the developments in society and the corporate world.
References


Twain, M. (1897). Following the Equator, Chapter XXXVIII, American Publishing Company, USA.


Table 1: Key Features of the National Education Policy (2020)

1. Curtailing dropout rates and ensuring universal access to education at all levels
2. Equitable and inclusive education: Learning for all
3. Towards a more holistic and multidisciplinary education
4. Equity and inclusion in higher education
5. Re-imagining vocational education
6. Online and digital education: Ensuring equitable use of technology
7. Renewed emphasis on professional education
Table 2: Key tips for policy makers, educationists, and corporate leaders on helping to make NEP (2020) a success

**Policy Makers**

1. Invest sufficient resources to ensure smooth implementation of the policy
2. Educate all stakeholders in the philosophy behind the policy
3. Train those that will be responsible for implementing various parts of the policy
4. Partner with scholars to conduct research, to track the implementation of the policy at various stages.
5. Measure the level of success of various projected benefits of the NEP.
6. Offer a hotline for various stakeholders so they may ask for guidance and clarifications when required
   
faculty, staff, and students for online teaching help
7. Revisit and revise, as necessary, tenets of the policy, at regular intervals, in consultation with various stakeholders

**Educationists**

1. Implement the policy in the true spirit of the policy
2. Modify your recruitment systems, campus culture, and delivery modes, as necessary
3. Offer feedback to the government about the content of the policy and issues faced in its implementation.

**Corporate Leaders**
1. Modify your recruitment systems, including campus hiring, to capitalize on the opportunity opened up by this policy

2. Track performance of employees hired pursuant to the new policy

3. Develop/modify induction programs to help introduce the new hires to your organization

4. Offer feedback to the government at regular intervals in terms of possible changes needed

5. Share with other corporates your success and failures with the new crop of graduates