

EDITORIAL

SHOULD THE NATION HAVE A NEW NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION?

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Twenty one years after becoming independent, the nation had its first National Policy on Education in 1968. After eleven years, in 1979, a Draft national Policy on education was printed and circulated by the Central Government (DOE 1979). After sixteen years of this attempt, in 1985, the Central Government brought out the “Challenge of Education” document and got it widely circulated so as to get suggestions for formulating a new Policy. In 1986, a new National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) was formulated. In 1990, the Central government got the Policy of 1986 reviewed by a Committee chaired by Acharya Ramamurti. Before the Policy could be modified in lines of the recommendations of this Committee, there was a change in the Central Government. In 1992, The Central Advisory Board of Education appointed Committee chaired by N. Janardan Reddy reviewed the recommendations of Acharya Ramamurti Committee. In 1992, based on the recommendations of this Committee, the Central Government brought out a modified version of NPE 1986. During the period 1986-1992, the Central Government brought out a few Programme of Action documents. It has been more than seventeen years since the modified NPE Policy document was published. During these seventeen years, a plethora of changes have taken place. Early childhood care and education has replaced elementary education in the article 45 of the Directive principles of the Constitution. The nation has Right to Education Act 2009. Many statutory bodies have come up to ensure quality in education. Some of the committees formed by the Central Government have questioned the manner of functioning of some of these statutory bodies. There has been phenomenal increase in privatisation of general higher education, technical education, medical education and teacher education. There has been large scale growth of deemed universities. Central Universities have been established in most of the states. At the international level too, a several new developments have taken place. In 1996, the Report of the International Commission on Education of UNESCO chaired by J. Delors was published. In 1998, there was World Declaration on Higher Education. In 2003, there was a follow-up Seminar on WDHE participated by countries in Asia Pacific Region. In 2005, UNESCSO brought out its Report on Towards Knowledge Societies. Education has become a part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) initiated General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). There has been a spurt of self-learning opportunities for rich through Internet and other media. The NPE 1986 had stated that “The implementation of the various parameters of the New Policy must be reviewed every five years. Appraisals at short intervals will also be made to ascertain the progress of implementation and the trends emerging from time to time”(Art.11.5). Hence, in view of vast changes in education scenario since 1992, it may be appropriate for the Central Government to take necessary steps for formulating a new policy on education. Some of the issues that the new policy may need to consider may be as follows.

A few strategies mentioned in the National Policy on Education as modified in 1992 are yet to be implemented. Some of the strategies which may need to be reviewed are : (a) Common educational structure, (b) Inclusion of +2 as part of school education (In 2010, many States have +2 as part of higher education and teachers teaching these classes need not have a B. Ed. degree and the concerned State government approved general class size is more than 100), (c) Checking of substandard institutions and substandard programmes, (d) Spending six per cent of national income for education; (e) Operationalising State advisory boards of education, (f) Providing training for educational planners, administrators and heads of institutions (Existing provision is adequate), (g) Making systematic assessment of performance of teachers (Existing provision is inadequate), (h) Creating Indian Education Service, (i) Appraising performance of institutions (NAAC gradation does not give assessment of performance of each of the Departments of the University or of a college and does not assess classroom teaching performance of teachers and school education is not covered by NAAC), (j) Making Payment of adequate salary to teachers and banning part time appointment in regular posts and enforcing teacher accountability, (k) De-linking of degrees from jobs, (l) Making network arrangements; (m) Operationalising national examination reform framework, (n) Operationalising Councils of Higher Education, (o) Increasing flexibility in the combination of courses, (p) Establishing National Evaluation Organisation, etc..

A few new issues that may be considered while formulating a new NPE may be (a) Establishing world class universities (It may take many years to get world recognition), (b) In view of proliferation of shadow education at a cost making private coaching by regular teachers punishable, (c) Bringing all educational programmes for SC & ST under one umbrella, (d) Making initial teacher training and study for first degree in medical education free and introducing grant in aid system for private institutions, (e) Utilising non teachers instead of regular teachers in coaching classes being run under government schemes, (f) Banning open university and other distance education and self-financed programmes and coaching programmes utilise teachers in service, (g) Ensuring regular inspection of teaching; (h) Making provision for special coaching facilities for first generation learners, (i) Having teaching competency test included in existing NET and SETs, (j) Considering the situation arising out of large scale increase in opportunities of self-initiated learning and private coaching, making university and board examinations open for all irrespective of previous formal qualifications, (k) Cancelling holidays in lieu of teaching days lost due to strikes and late admissions and providing proportionate benefit to the concerned teachers, (l) Making month wise time tables to give scope for flexibility in curricula and teaching techniques, (m) Making extension work included as part of duty of all categories of teachers, (n) Ensuring maintenance of record for daily activities for all categories of teachers, (o) Ensuring payment of salaries to teachers by cheques as condition for recognition, (p) Making it mandatory for institution to assess their programmes of the previous academic session and make it available for public use by placing these in their web sites, (q) Abolishing statutory bodies like AICTE, NCTE, UGC etc. or changing nature of their functioning by modifying concerned Acts, etc.

A few issues related to school education which may be considered are: (a) Modifying the National Council for Teacher Education Act so as to make it applicable to all States and the Union Territories and making it compulsory for all the members of the General Council and Regional Committees to have experience in school teaching in addition to a M. Ed. or M. A. (Education) degree, (b) Considering the sub standard programmes in preparation of teacher educators, instituting teacher educator selection tests at national and state level (a large number of M. Ed. degree holders have been produced by universities-government and private without bothering for NCTE norms), (c) Modifying existing Central Government scheme -Establishing institutions instead of giving grants to States run institutions as per Central Government Schemes (Large numbers of IASEs, CTEs and DIETs being funded by the Central Government scheme do not maintain adequate staff and material resources and in many cases there have been large scale wastage of human and material resources), (d) Making provision for special initial teacher training for teaching gifted children in schools such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, and providing better salary to such teachers, (e) Making qualifications for a Lecturer in Education specified by the UGC and by the NCTE same, (f) Instead of extending duration of B. Ed. programme from one year to two years, providing increased duration to existing B. Ed. programmes by making institutions and departments of education offering such programmes function without long holidays and giving faculty members proportionate leave salary benefits, as found in case of Regional Institutes of Education of NCERT, (g) Developing and notifying standards for various types of school teachers and teacher educators, (h) Developing and notifying standards for teacher trainees for various types of initial teacher training programmes, (i) Making school teaching for a specific period mandatory for all faculty members involved in teacher training programmes, (j) Making provision for induction programmes for beginning teachers with provision for selection and training of mentors for training new teachers, (k) Making provision for National level and State level school teacher and teacher educator selection tests and making such tests open for persons with or without formal teacher training qualifications or M. Ed. or M. A (Education) degrees (There have been instances of Professors of Education in Central Universities and NCERT and Principals of Government Training Colleges of many States having no B. Ed. or M. Ed. degrees), (l) Allowing States, having high proportion of untrained teachers, especially NE States, to go for alternative mode of initial teacher training-teacher training through schools as found in case of the UK and the USA, (m) Modifying EGS & AES to have regular teachers instead of para teachers, (n) Making child labour punishable and abolishing schools for child labour, (o) Converting all Anganwadis to pre school centres and making pre school teaching part of elementary school initial teacher training programmes, and (p) Bringing all types of teacher training under higher education.

In order to formulate NPE 1986, in 1985, the Central Government had brought out the 'Challenge of Education' document that highlighted pros and con of various strategies proposed for improving education. There is perhaps necessity for developing such a publication in 2010 that may generate effective dialogue over various issues and provide inputs for formulating a new NPE.