

The tech and human impact of the NEP

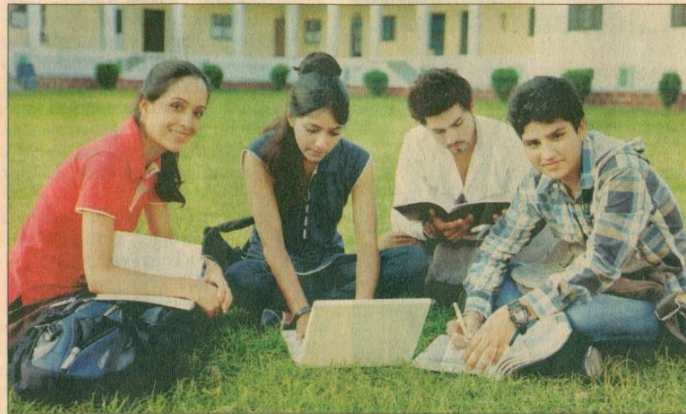
Can it lead to a harmonic balance between job-creators and job-seekers to counter the challenges of unemployment?

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THE DRAFT NATIONAL Education Policy (NEP) 2019 was one of the first official documents to be announced in the second term of the Narendra Modi government. The last such re-evaluation took place in 1986, later modified in 1992, post which the global educational and professional landscape has been transformed. The 484-page document consists of the segments 'school education', 'higher education', 'additional focus areas' and 'transforming education', built on the pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. It promises a reconfiguration of the curricular and pedagogical structure.

It recognises education as a public good rather than a commodity. This change of thought is reflected in the way it perceives K12 education, reeling in orthodoxy and lack of empathy. A 5+3+3+4 structure has been proposed, which clusters students based on age groups and develops teaching methodologies accordingly:

- Foundational stage (3-8 years): Multi-oriented, play-centric, intuitive and discovery-based learning methods;
- Preparatory stage (8-11 years): Builds



upon established premises of the foundational stage incorporating both informal and formal elements of classroom learning and preparing for the middle stage;

► Middle stage (11-14 years): The focus will be on identifying latent skills in kids while creating a spirit of scientific enquiry;

► Secondary stage (14-18 years): Multi-disciplinary approach that endeavours to sum up the entire schooling with extensive detail and greater depth to prepare the student for higher avenues while prioritising individual interests and aspirations.

Higher education

According to the All India Survey on Higher Education, India's gross enrolment ratio in higher education was an appalling 25.8% in 2017-18. Frankly put, higher edu-

cation in India is a privilege. High cost, lack of employment opportunities and inaccessibility are some reasons. The draft NEP seeks to address this step-by-step. To quote, it "unequivocally commits to raising investment in education substantially, including a significant increase in public financial investment, as also in philanthropic investment," and suggests increase in educational expenditure from the current 10% of overall public expenditure in education to 20%, over 10 years. While this is not as strong as the proposal of spending 6% of GDP towards education, the move is welcome. But great care needs to be taken to ensure such grants do not forcibly change the moral fabric or institutional ethics. The draft NEP also seeks to boost research across higher vistas of education by setting up a National

Research Foundation. This again is a welcome move.

To address the skills gap between what students are taught in academic institutions and what they are expected to do in professional environment, the policy has focused on industry-based skill empowerment. It lays stress on creativity and innovation, which are the key factors for one to excel in the 21st century. It proposes a new National Educational Technology Forum and induction of new-age technologies such as online learning platforms, AI-driven customised learning solutions, video-based learning, peer-to-peer learning, etc. It also encourages the establishment of dedicated institutions that specialise in offering a curriculum that helps students to grow their understanding of future technologies, and develop a spirit of innovation and problem-solving at a global scale. The report suggests this can be achieved by moving away from the canonical system of affiliations and by giving autonomy to colleges and universities. This can enhance the choice set of Indian students for pursuing different fields of education in the short run, and in the long run can potentially reshape their attitude towards the education system as a whole.

The draft NEP calls for an all-inclusive education policy that can produce a harmonic balance between job-creators and job-seekers to counter the challenges of unemployment and to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend.

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