

Recommendations on National Education Policy

Submitted by Nirantar Trust

With over two decades of experience of working on literacy and education, Nirantar would like to make the following recommendations:

Objective of Education:

- Mahatma Gandhi said, *“The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated.”* Inspired by the thoughts of the Father of the Nation, the Policy brings into focus the role of education in inculcating values, providing skills and competencies to citizens, and enabling them to contribute to the nation’s wellbeing.

The quote from Mahatma Gandhi, which emphasizes the need for education to not be driven by market requirements is an important reminder of where the true potential of education lies – in facilitating development of the learner and not the market economy. While it is admirable that the Education Policy is being guided by this thought, it is important to ensure that the added emphasis on skill-building and the constant reference to students as ‘products’ and educational processes in terms of outputs needs to be critiqued. The policy lacks the vision of education that enables individuals to become thinking, questioning and participative citizens. A policy needs to be a roadmap for the future which it leaves out of its ambit.

Curriculum and Ethics Education

- While the motivations of the proposed subject on Value based Education and ethics education is interesting, we believe that instead of making this a separate subject, it would be more useful to integrate the issues mentioned here like fraternity, democracy, social justice, freedom etc, in the design and content of the curriculum. The policy talks about the curriculum only in the context of skill building and employability. This integration would make the curriculum more well rounded and intersectional.

No-Detention Policy:

- It is imperative to impart skills and knowledge among teachers and concerned government officials about CCE. If a teacher will work with students based on their learning level, as recommended under CCE, learning gaps will be identified in the beginning. Both teacher and student can work together to fulfill those learning gaps. More emphasis should be given on developing sound understanding about CCE among concerned stakeholders of education system without undermining the essence of CCE in the learning process. That the onus of failing needs to lie on the system of education and the pedagogy as opposed to individual students because failure needs to be viewed as a systemic issue and not as an individual learner's issue. Teachers should be made accountable for ensuring learning progress among students without creating fear among students for examination.

We recommend that the no-detention policy, be continued as per the RTE Act. Employing fear of failure as a teaching tool is deeply problematic and counterproductive and it might be more helpful to use learners' curiosity to learn to further the idea of a knowledge based education system.

Merging Low Performing Schools:

- While the school mapping exercise to identify school with ‘low enrolment and inadequate infrastructure’ is a useful exercise, the suggestion to merge schools located in a certain radius can be counterproductive to the idea of gender equity as it will reduce girls’ access to formal education. In keeping with the policy’s idea of enabling equal access and opportunity, especially to young girls, whose mobility is controlled and limited, we believe that merging schools would be detrimental to the idea of gender equity.
- Merger of schools will also pave the way for mushrooming of private schools, which the policy does critique as well. This dichotomy, of critiquing something on the hand and encouraging it unintentionally on the other gives a confusing message.

Working Children:

- The sentence “Open schooling facilities will be expanded to enable dropouts and working children to pursue education without attending full time formal schools.” and particularly the use of the phrase ‘working children’ seems to coincide with the government’s revision of child labour laws – which reduces the age to 14 – and allows work under certain debatable and ambiguous conditions (like home based and entrepreneurial work). This further highlights the emphasis on employability and seems to encourage vocational learning – without understanding child labour as a structural issue that needs to be addressed very differently.

Nomadic and Migrant Children:

- The government's focus on bringing nomadic and migrant children into the formal schooling system is an admirable one. In addition to the policy's recommendation of doing away with migration and school leaving certificates, we would also like to recommend the removal of the requirement of address proof for admissions, as this is big impediment to nomadic and migrant families. Additionally, further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that children moving from one school to another, either inter or intra state, have a smooth transition.

Counsellors for Students:

- The Policy's recommendation of a 'local level, a part-time sub-committee of experts comprising of child and clinical psychologists' is highly appreciated. However, one needs to acknowledge the depth of mental health issues and the lack of accessible services. We recommend that the committee which is constituted, be full time and not part time and also function at the Block Level.

ICTs and Cyber-Safety:

- The added focus on ICTs also brings with it the question of cyber-safety, which has not been addressed at all in the policy. The scope of ICT integration also raises concerns of online sexual harassment and bullying which need to be addressed.

Teacher Training:

- While the policy is mindful of the necessity to invest in the training and development of teachers, it only recommends teacher trainings be conducted

once in every three years – which needs to be revised. The trainings and inputs provided to teachers need to happen more consistently and on a more regular basis.

Affirmative Action:

- While it is commendable that the policy talks about affirmative action vis-à-vis gender, it seems like a glaring oversight that a National Policy on Education has not addressed caste-based reservations. While the policy does mention a number of interventions that are required to enable students from ‘socially disadvantaged’ groups to begin and continue with their education – the omission of caste based reservation as a method to ensure this inclusion is troubling.

Internationalization of Education:

- The Policy mentions the internationalization of education, one part of which involves foreign universities setting up centres in India. Keeping in mind, the GATS Agenda, the Policy needs to clarify what the implications of inviting foreign universities are for the existing Indian Universities.

‘Some Inputs for Draft Education Policy 2016’ reads like a safe policy, the implications of which need to be reflected on with skepticism, as the policy stays away from making any commitment regarding when and how its recommendations will be achieved.