

# The spirit of NEP: How does it fare in action?

The committee submitted the report almost immediately after the National Democratic Alliance formed its second successive government in 2019.

Rishikesh B S  
21 April 2024,



On the last day of May, five years ago, Dr K Kasturirangan submitted his committee's report titled 'Draft National Education Policy 2019' (DNEP) to the then Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The department has now been rechristened the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The committee submitted the report almost immediately after the National Democratic Alliance formed its second successive government in 2019.

In July 2020, a little over a year later, after seeking input from citizens on the draft policy and receiving over two lakh responses, these were reviewed and relevant ones incorporated. Post this exercise, the Union government adopted the Kasturirangan Committee report.

Though the National Education Policy 2020 was a mere 66 pages compared to the 460 pages of the DNEP, it ensured that all the key recommendations were carried over. The NEP 2020 is founded on the five guiding pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability and aims to prepare children and youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present as well as the future.

It has been almost four years since the Government of India adopted the policy. With the general elections in progress, a valid question to ask at this juncture is to what extent the NEP has been implemented.

The NEP offers recommendations on two parallel tracks. On the one hand, it recommends immediate tasks with target dates for more pressing contemporary issues. On the other, it puts forth a plan to be implemented over the next decade to bring about the paradigm shift that it envisages for the education system in our country. This piece attempts to look at key provisions in both tracks.

On the first track, many target dates have passed or are about to come up and hence we could evaluate it directly, while on the long-term track, it is important to analyse what steps have been taken to see if an implementation plan is in place.

In track one, there is a target that every student in Grade 3 and beyond will achieve foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by 2025. Though the target date has moved by two years, given the school lockdown during the pandemic, work towards this provision began in earnest through the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy Bharat (NIPUN Bharat). Most states commenced these programmes.

However, the recent ASER report (2024), indicates that a significant proportion of children do not have foundational literacy and numeracy skills even when they reach high school. It is clear this is work only half done and the mission needs to be strengthened at multiple levels.

Among major changes, the policy envisages changes to the structure of our education system. At the school level, it suggests five years of foundational learning followed by three years each for preparatory and middle, concluding with four years of secondary education.

Amongst the biggest steps towards implementation taken so far, is action towards the development of the National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCF).

### **Teacher development**

However, the NCF by itself it will not be able to achieve much and needs support on two crucial fronts: teacher professional development (TPD) and the development of new teaching-learning material, including textbooks. On both these fronts, progress has been slow and not comprehensive.

A set of teaching-learning material titled, Jaadui Pitara, for the foundational stages of learning was released in October 2022, as content to help teachers adopt a creative, play-based, pedagogic approach.

The Pitara has creative aids such as toys, games, puzzles and storybooks for students, as well as teacher handbooks.

However, it has remained a showpiece with very little work done on those lines across pre-primary and Grades 1 and 2. The State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) should have taken up this effort on a war footing. One is yet to see that momentum in this regard.

The NEP considers teachers as the torchbearers of change in education. Therefore, reforms related to teachers are critical to implementing the programme.

In 2019, the MoE, to its credit, organised programmes in alignment with NEP. These initiatives included the National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancements (NISHTHA) and the Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching, aimed at bringing a fresh model of professional development into the school education domain, through hybrid and online sessions.

Given the paradigm shifts that the NEP envisages, these professional development activities should be a continuous affair and should also go beyond mere online or digital offerings.

This requires active collaboration with existing institutions such as the State Institute of Education Management and Training, the State Institute of School Leadership and Education Planning and the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET).

Unfortunately, most DIETs have remained mute spectators and have not begun any useful work to enable continuous training for teachers in their districts. In the recent Union budget, a large sum of money has been allocated to many DIETs, but the re-alignment of their role has not yet occurred.

The institutions operate on a redundant framework provided to them in 1986, focusing on an outdated diploma programme to prepare new teachers. This is baffling when the policy clearly states that by 2030, teachers should be recruited only from an integrated four-year undergraduate programme.

## **Regulation**

Finally, on the aspects of governance and regulation, changes have been the weakest and slowest. These are also recommendations that require the action of state governments and involve restructuring school education to avoid conflict of interest. The move is also meant to ensure efficient governance, also the toughest task to accomplish.

Currently, the education bureaucracy owns and manages public schools, and also regulates private schools in that state. This has created a situation wherein neither are public schools managed well nor has the system been able to stop the commercialisation of education, allowing schools to become for-profit businesses. No state has come forward to restructure the school education system as per the NEP recommendation in this regard to improve efficiency at an overall level.

In conclusion, one can say, four years after the adoption of the policy, the implementation of NEP has been a mixed bag. Some useful programmes have been launched by the Union and some state governments, but there remain many gaps. In many instances, the spirit of the policy has not been kept intact.

In Karnataka, for instance, an implementation task force was set up in 2020, under the chairpersonship of S V Ranganath, a former chief secretary of the Government of Karnataka. The committee submitted its report with a detailed action plan on what the state could do to implement NEP and improve the education system. The report looked specifically at what

already existed in Karnataka in alignment with the policy recommendations and suggested strengthening those aspects. However, very little progress was made.

In the past, Karnataka had successfully launched a continuous teacher professional development programme called Guru Chetna which was embedded on a tech platform and enabled teachers to choose the professional course and the location of its delivery. This programme had a bouquet of over 100 short-term professional courses. Guru Chetna came to a screeching halt due to the pandemic-induced lockdowns. Despite the task force's recommendation, the programme was not commenced.

Similarly, Karnataka public schools are well-suited to be converted to school complexes per the policy. However, various compulsions persuaded the department to focus on establishing more such schools instead of creating additional resources in existing schools and converting them to school complexes.

At present, a detailed National Curricular Framework is available to begin implementation, but states that claim to have accepted NEP are not doing enough to ensure teachers are well-equipped to carry out changes in classrooms. States that have taken a stand against implementing NEP are spending precious time, money and effort in reinventing the wheel – all at the cost of learning, which to say the least, is a massive crisis we currently face.

*(The writer leads the Hub for Education, Law and Policy at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. The views expressed are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of the university)*