
HISTORY OF EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Financial growth, inclusive growth and high employability are significantly linked to education policy of a country. Beginning with Kothari Commission (1966) with its emphasis on science & technology and research to National Policy on Education (1986), several committees during the last decade have advocated for greater foreign collaboration, public private partnership and improvement in quality. The RTE Act 2002 has been a significant milestone in ensuring near universal enrolment. However there are constant laments about poor infrastructure, indifferent teaching and government schools being outperformed by private schools. Make-In-India campaign seeks to significantly bolster India's manufacturing sinews and exports by fostering Ease of Doing Business. Its success, however, would critically hinge on how the leitmotif of education policy is etched in the promised new policy this year.

Keywords: Financial growth, education policy

INTRODUCTION

There is a distinct buzz about PM Modi's new campaign for Make-in-India. The thrust is to increase share of manufacturing from the current level of 15% of GDP to 25% and create additional employment opportunity for 100 million during the next decade. This has led a few cynics to observe that "there is a lot of sizzle but where is the steak?". The RBI Governor Rajan is of the view that the government should give primacy to bolstering domestic demand; i.e. "Make for India" rather than opting for export led growth. Columnist Debasis Basu is prescient to observe that the debate is all about "Cost of Doing Business in India" for which the quality of human resources and cost of capital are therefore would be the critical factors.

Governments all over the world place a major emphasis on education policy. There is a global pressure on increasing attention on the outcomes of educational policies and their impact on social and economic development. However, there is often a lack of understanding of how educational policies are formed and what constitutes an education policy. An attempt is made in this module to analyse the nature of educational policy, basic features of education policies and the intended outcomes of these policies. Education policy refers to the rules and principles that govern the operation of educational systems. The module also tries to answer questions regarding the goals of education, strategies employed for achieving these goals and for identifying tools for assessing their impact.

Education Policy in Pre-Independent India

The education policy in pre-independent India could further be classified into two time periods - Pre-British and the British period.

Pre-British Period

While discussing education policy in Pre-British India, an attempt has been made to analyse educational policies from the beginning of ancient period to the arrival of British. Since the beginning of Indian civilisation till contemporary times those in power have directed the course of education but it was only with the advent of modern times that a scientific approach began to be adopted in formulating educational policies.

There are no available literary sources for getting an authentic understanding of educational policies in

ancient India. Literary sources of 1000 A.D. and onwards give a reasonably adequate knowledge of the policies that governed the ancient education system in India, the prominent sources being the Rigveda, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Epics and the Puranas (Scharfe 2002).

The Aryans entered India in II B.C. These Aryans were the first to make a significant attempt in formulating an education policy in India. The Aryans had clearly defined the nature of their educational system and the natives who were referred to as 'Dasyus' had to adhere to the norms that the Aryans had laid down (Keay 1972).

Ancient Indian thinkers regarded education as an instrument which puts an ignorant person on the path of an intellectual, progressive, moral and virtuous course of life. Students in ancient India were required to study the subjects not only from the point of view of making themselves capable of handling life, but were also required to study them basically from the point of view of engaging in research and work towards creating an advanced body of knowledge in the area. As a result when students reached the status of learned persons, they were greatly respected and revered. In the ancient period a pride of place was accorded to education that primarily drew its inspiration from religion (Scharfe 2002).

After the Vedic period, there developed large kingdoms of powerful kings who wanted to develop an advanced course of life in their society. They took keen interest in promoting the interests of higher education by giving rich donations and lands to learned scholars. And more importantly these kings enacted policies to redefine and reconstruct the education system in India. The major universities in ancient India were Nalanda and Taxila were known for their scholarship (Scharfe 2002).

British Period

The introduction of western education was an event of great historical significance for the emergence of an education policy in India. Before the introduction of modern education, opportunities for learning were generally confined to a very small portion of the population. Those from castes and classes placed lower down in the social hierarchy had hardly any access to education. The pioneering work in the field of education under the British was done by missionaries. They did make efforts to spread education but often it was motivated by the desire for the spread of Christianity among the natives of India. One important result of the great efforts by missionaries was to stir up governments both in England and in India to realise that it was their duty to do something for the education of the people under their rule (Keay 1972).

The Charter of 1698 clearly stated that it was the duty of English ministers of religion to give education along with their primary duty of spreading the Gospel. But the East India Company had realised the political significance of a policy of religious neutrality and therefore refrained from carrying out the directions of the Charter of 1698. However, the Company encouraged educational activity by establishing schools with liberal grants-in-aid. Thus the St. Mary's School was established in Madras in 1715, followed by the establishment of two more charity schools in 1717 by the Danish missionaries. In 1718 a charity school in Bombay and another in 1731 in Calcutta were opened. In 1787 two charity schools for boys and girls separately were established in Madras (Singh 2005). But their curriculum was mostly limited to the acquisition of the 3R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) and Christian teachings. In 1781, Sir Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, established the Calcutta Madrasa for the cultivation of Arabic and Persian studies and he also founded the Benares Sanskrit College in 1791 to promote classical studies in Sanskrit. One of the prominent motives of establishing these institutions was to train Indian assistants to English Judges, in order to explain the principles of Hindu and Muslim laws (Basu 1982).

Education Policy in Independent India

After the Sargent Commission, there were no major commissions or reports in the British period. Even the Sargent Commission's Report did not see the light of the day. Following the transfer of power, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) decided to set up two Commissions, one to deal with university education and the other to deal with secondary education, recognising the fact that the requirements of independent India would be different. It became imminent that the education system in India would be restructured. This decision came at a time, when the promises made to the people in the field of education during the freedom struggle, were to be implemented. Provision of free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years was being debated in the Constituent Assembly, and these debates ultimately found expression in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India. The goal set for the country's educational policy was to work out a system of universal elementary education by 1960. Necessary changes were also effected in the system of secondary and higher education in keeping with the felt needs of the country (Saikia 1998).

A new chapter in education policy began with India becoming independent. A number of problems and challenges had surfaced in the country because of the sheer diverse character of Indian society. The Government established education commissions in order to address these challenges and recommend comprehensive policies for educational problems and also for the improvement of the education system in India.

University Education Commission (1948)

The first Commission to be appointed in independent India was the University Education Commission of 1948, under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, to report on the status of Indian university education and suggest improvements and extensions that would be desirable to suit the present and future requirements of the country (Aggarwal 1993). The Commission, which produced a comprehensive and voluminous report, set for itself the task of not only reorienting the education system to face the challenges emerging from a long period of colonisation but also to increase the country's general prosperity, create an effective and functional democracy and reduce socio-economic inequalities. Higher education for the next generations was envisaged as one of the principal aims of the education policy that the country was proposing to formulate.

This Commission had aimed at creating universities which would provide knowledge and wisdom for a comprehensive development of the personality. It considered university education as a pivotal step for higher level of learning. The main goal of establishing a university in a particular region was to make higher education accessible to all sections of society, irrespective of region, caste, gender and region. This report proposed the re-construction of education system in tune with the vision of the Indian constitution.

Secondary Education Commission (1952)

The Secondary Education Commission was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar in 1952. The Commission submitted its report to the Government in 1953. The report gave a broader view about the educational problems of Indians and proposed to increase efficiency of production. The report of the Commission suggested diversification of high school courses and the establishment of multipurpose high schools. Another proposal was that of introducing a uniform pattern throughout India. Further, it also recommended the setting up of technical schools.

The recommendations of Mudaliar Commission occupy a very significant place in the development of secondary education in independent India. Most of the educationists have praised its recommendations for providing very practical and useful suggestions. However, there are a few who have pointed out the limitations of this report. They opined that the Commission's recommendations lacked freshness, were a replication of old policies and gave imperfect and distorted suggestions that

could not really be implemented. The Commission's report also did not provide framework for promotion of women's education.

Indian Education Commission (1964-66)

The Mudaliar Commission was followed by the appointment of the Indian Education Commission under the chairmanship of D. S. Kothari. Popularly known as the Kothari Commission, it was entrusted with the task of dealing with all aspects and sectors of education and to advise the Government on the evolution of a National System of Education. It is in accordance with the recommendations of this Commission that the National Educational Policy of 1968 was formulated.

In its opening paragraphs, the report of the Kothari Commission on Education observed that "the destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms. In a world based on science and technology, it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of people. On the quality and number of persons coming out of our schools and colleges will depend our success in the great enterprise of national reconstruction whose principal objective is to raise the standard of living of our people" (Report of the Education Commission 1964-66. Vol. 1).

In the Commission's view education had the power to work as a powerful instrument of social, economic and political change. Therefore, educational objectives have to be related to long term national aspirations. If the change is to be achieved without any violent revolution, the only instrument, the Commission noted was education.

National Policy on Education (1968)

In 1968 the Government of India had formulated the National Policy on Education, in response to the recommendations of the Kothari Commission. The National Policy on Education sought 'total reformation' and aimed at extending the prospects of education to all sections of the society to accomplish the goal of harmony and integration. The policy suggested the provision of compulsory education to children in the 6-14 years age group as proposed in the Indian Constitution. Further, it also recommended that regional languages must be encouraged for being used in secondary schools. The Commission was of the opinion that English had to be the medium of instruction in schools and it considered Hindi as the national language. The National Policy on Education also promoted the development of Sanskrit, which was the symbol of India's cultural heritage. This policy recommended to the Government of India that 6 percent of the national income be spent on education.

The National Policy on Education 1968 was widely criticised for its promotion of the 'three language formula'. The general feeling was that the third language was thrust upon the students even though they were not interested. Further, it was also pointed out that the policy was very vague and lacking in clarity by not indicating the ways by which the guidelines contained in the policy could be implemented. However, the policy received considerable attention as it was the first of its kind to give a proper direction to the educational system in independent India. The 'three language formula' was seen as a step towards national integration and was viewed as a facility provided for the improvement of education among the minorities (Sharma 2004). In spite of the criticism, this policy was still hailed as the first systematic effort to give shape to Indian education.

Draft National Policy on Education (1979)

The Draft National Policy on Education – 1979 proposed the development of an educational system that helped people not only to enhance their knowledge but also academic skills. It also called for building awareness of morals and ethics among students so that they can develop a good personality and become worthy citizens. The Draft National Policy on Education suggested that a good educational system that reinforces the constitutional values must be implemented. The thrust was on encouraging national integration through education.

The Draft National Policy on Education envisaged that the present Indian education system has to be transformed in the light of contemporary needs of the Indian people (Chaubey 1988). It also laid down that the education system must be flexible and responsive to all conditions. Further, the Indian education system must endeavour to reduce the gap between the educated classes and the masses, in order to overcome the feelings of superiority, inferiority and alienation. The policy also suggested that educational institutions and communities should work together and help each other.

National Policy on Education (1986)

The Government of India initiated the National Policy on Education in 1986. Its major objective was to provide education to all sections of society, with a particular focus on scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and women, who were deprived of educational opportunities for centuries. In order to fulfil these objectives the National Policy on Education (1986) stressed on the provision of fellowships for the poor, imparting adult education, recruiting teachers from oppressed groups and also developing new schools and colleges. The policy focused more on providing primary education to students. Further it also gave importance for the establishment of open universities by setting up the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) at Delhi. The policy had recommended that education be given to rural people in consonance with the Gandhian philosophy. It also set the stage for the emergence of information technology in education, besides opening up the technical education sector in a rather big way to private enterprise.

National Policy on Education (1992)

The Government of India had set up a commission under the chairmanship of Acharaya Ramamurti in 1990 to reassess the impact of the provisions National Policy on Education and also to give recommendations. Later, under the leadership of N. Janadhana Reddy the Central Advisory Board of Education was set up. This Board considered some modifications in NPE. The report of the committee had been submitted on 1992 and it came to be known as the National Programme of Action of 1992. The National Policy on Education – 1992 stressed on promotion of development and strengthening national integration. The National Policy on Education (1992) emphasised the need for greater transformation of the Indian educational system, with a focus on quality enhancement. The policy also stressed on developing moral values among students and bringing education closer to life (Ranganathan 2007).

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or The Education for All Movement is a central government programme which aimed at universalising elementary education in a time bound manner. This programme has been in operation since 2000-2001. However, its origin dates back to 1993-94, when the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched. DPEP had basically aimed at fulfilling the goal of universalisation of primary education. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan aimed at creating an ideal system of education which enabled individuals to develop and inculcate knowledge, create awareness of social and human values, and build a strong character. SSA proposed that the education system must develop in consonance with contemporary societal needs (Mohanty 2003).

Availability of infrastructure is fundamental in providing access to education. Under the SSA scheme between 2002-03 and 2008-09 1,48,492 new primary schools and 1,33,277 new upper primary schools were opened and an additional 8,00,000 classrooms were built, significantly expanding access to the elementary level. Further, the Mission also motivated increased efforts to develop, fund and implement specific strategies to reach deprived urban children, particularly in the 35 cities with more than one million inhabitants (Joint Review Mission of SSA 2009).

Right to Education Act (2009)

Right to Education Act or The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act emphasises the importance of free and compulsory education for children who are in the age group of 6 to 14 years. The Act came into existence on 1st April, 2010 and since then India became one of the 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child. Further, this Act specifies that all private schools have to reserve 25% of seats to children of socially disadvantaged groups. It also laid down that no child shall be held back, expelled or required to pass a board examination until the completion of elementary education. For school dropouts there is a special training, given under this Act. Since education is a concurrent issue in the Indian Constitution, the responsibilities of implementation of this Act have been distributed among centre, state and local governmental bodies. The central government bears 70 percent of the expenses of the implementation of this Act and 30 percent is provided by state government.

However, the RTE encountered several hurdles in the implementation level. Only a few are mentioned below. First, this scheme covers children in classes 1 to 8 only. Second, the Act is gender neutral and does not provide any special provisions for encouraging education of girls. Third, it is also silent on the right to education for children with disability. Fourth, the Act does not talk of the post- elementary stage. After completing elementary education in elite schools children from vulnerable groups will not be able to pursue their education in such schools or colleges. Then they might have to slip back to schools of questionable standards which will have negative psychological impact on them. Finally, it is evidently apparent that there are many incidents of corruption by school managements while implementing the Act.

Besides these centrally sponsored education policies, state governments have also launched many support schemes such as for example, the Midday Meal Scheme, Bicycle scheme, establishment of pre and post-matric hostels to enhance access and utilisation of educational opportunities. Almost every state government has set up committees and commissions to recommend policy changes in the field of education, to make it more 'inclusive', 'quality conscious' and 'attune itself to meet globally accepted standards'. But at the implementation level there have been many shortfalls which need to be addressed in future policies.

CONCLUSION

Education policy has played an immensely important role in the development of an educational system in India since pre-independence days. Since education policies reflect the approaches of those in power towards education, they have a close bearing on the goals and strategies of the education system that is in existence at that point of time. From courses to curriculum to pedagogical practices, education policy sets the framework within which an educational system takes shape. In India the thrust of educational policies has been changing from time-to-time in response to the emerging socio- economic needs of the country. Till the enactment of the Charter Act of 1813, during British rule there was no formal education policy in place, but since then the Woods Education Despatch of 1854 and Report of the Sargeant Commission before independence have impacted the course that the educational system in India has taken. The shift that started taking place in the elite character of education during the British period was reflected in the educational policies that recognized the need for government support for starting educational institutions that opened their doors for not only the upper strata of society, but also others who were desirous of seeking education. Such steps as grant- in-aid, setting up of departments of education, establishment of universities laid the foundation for a well laid out system of education in India.

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