

## **"The draft National Education Policy reinforces outdated ideas about the goals of a foundational literacy programme."**

Many children in elementary classrooms across India cannot read and write proficiently, as demonstrated on an annual basis by the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER). This affects other school-based learning, as well as functioning in societies and economies that prize literacy.

### **Capabilities of young children**

It was heartening, therefore, to see a chapter devoted to "Foundational Literacy and Numeracy" in the draft National Education Policy, 2019. The focus it places on the early years is welcome, and the continuity it recommends between the pre-primary and primary years is necessary. Likewise, its emphasis on mother tongue-based education and oral language development are critical. However, the analysis presented on why children fail to learn to read and write largely points to factors surrounding the teaching and learning process — the health and nutritional status of children, high student-teacher ratios, and so on. While each of these factors is undoubtedly important, they do not address with sufficient clarity curricular, pedagogical and teacher education-related issues that plague the teaching and learning of early literacy in many Indian classrooms.

Most classrooms across India view the task of foundational literacy as teaching children to master the script, and being able to read simple words and passages with comprehension. Higher order meaning making, critical thinking, reading and responding to literature, and writing are typically reserved for later years of schooling. This draft reinforces such restrictive and outdated ideas about the goals of a foundational literacy programme.

Research evidence from around the globe demonstrates unequivocally that even very young children are capable of using early forms of reading, writing and drawing to express themselves and to communicate; they are also capable of inferential meaning-making, critical thinking, and so on. This entire body of scholarship, referred to as "emergent literacy", has been ignored in the draft. This has powerful consequences for the recommendations that follow, which propose largely oral activities for the pre-primary grades, reading hours for Grades 1-3, with an additional hour for writing starting only in Grades 4 and 5. It contradicts evidence suggesting that young children be taught listening, speaking, reading and writing simultaneously and not sequentially.

### **Many pedagogical approaches**

Another concern is that the recommendations are based on generic theories of early childhood education, such as multiple age groups learning together in flexible, play- and activity-based ways. They don't draw upon ideas specific to the teaching and learning of early literacy. Early literacy requires a "balance" between helping children to acquire the script, and engaging them with higher order meaning making. It also requires knowledge of a variety of pedagogical approaches, such as reading aloud to children, guiding children in their efforts to read and write, encouraging indepen-

dent exploration, helping them learn about different genres of texts, and so on. Further, it needs a balance of materials — moving beyond textbooks and workbooks to high quality children’s literature, material created by the children themselves, and the like.

Teachers need to know how to differentiate instruction for learners at different levels and how to provide specific help to students who are struggling. This also requires sufficient time — an average of two-three hours per day, as per the recommendations of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). While it may be beyond the scope of a policy document to detail specific curricular and pedagogical approaches, it must provide sufficient direction for a national curriculum framework to pick up from — in this case, it should signal the need for a balanced and comprehensive approach to foundational literacy and knowledgeable teachers for its implementation. Earlier documents addressing this issue (for example, MHRD’s Padhe Bharat, Badhe Bharat, 2014, and Ambedkar University’s position paper on Early Language and Literacy in India, 2016) have been far more specific in recommending a comprehensive approach with expanded time, and a balance of goals, methods and materials.

## Teaching literacy

This brings me to a third concern, which is a lack of discussion about what it takes to prepare teachers to successfully teach foundational literacy in a multilingual country. Instead, the document recommends recruiting volunteers and community members to support the acquisition of early literacy (even remedial instruction!) in the primary grades, albeit under the guidance of teachers. This lends credence to a dangerous and erroneous idea that any literate person can teach literacy, and undercuts sophisticated understandings related to children’s development and literacy learning that teachers ideally bring to their jobs. Volunteers can be used, but cannot be a primary mechanism that a national policy relies upon to deliver foundational literacy to students.

In focusing on the limitations of the non-academic nature of anganwadi experiences on the one hand, and the inappropriate curricular and pedagogic practices followed by many private pre-schools on the other, the authors of the draft appear to have not engaged with the advances made by scholars, practitioners and policy-makers in the field of early literacy.

## GS World Team...

### Draft of new education policy

#### Why in the discussion?

- After the controversy of three language formula of the draft of new education policy on amended draft has been released in which there is no mention of Hindi being mandatory in non-Hindi states.
- In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and other parties had opposed the three language formula in the draft of the new education policy and alleged that it was like imposing Hindi language.
- To make a new education policy, A committee headed by Kasturirangan was formed. There are 11 members in the committee.

#### What was amended?

- Under the revised draft of the three language formula, the students will now be free to read any three languages. However a literary language would be necessary in it.
- In the old draft there was a provision for reading a local language with Hindi, English.
- In the draft of the revised education policy, the three language formula has been elucidated. Now they do not mention any language.
- Although in the draft of the revised education policy, it has been clearly stated that school students must study three languages.

#### Major recommendations

- Under this, an attempt has been made to expand the scope of the Right to Education Act (RTE), as well as graduate courses have been revised.

- In this draft policy, with the option of restarting the four-year program of Liberal Arts Science Education and the removal of several programs, along with M. Phil has also been proposed
- According to this draft policy, Ph.D. for either a master's degree or a four-year bachelor's degree has been made mandatory.
- In the new curriculum 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 design (ages 3-8 years, 8-11 years, 11-14 years and 14-18 years) has been prepared to cover children from 3 to 18 years old. In it the policy has been prepared for inclusion as a part of the restructuring of education from primary education to school curriculum.
- It also reviews the draft policy Section 12 (1) (C) (abuse of 25 percent reservation for economically weaker sections in private schools).

#### **Other major recommendations**

- A State Government Regulatory Authority (SSRA), an independent regulator for school education and a National Higher Education Regulatory Authority for higher education will be set up.
- Private schools are free to set their fees, but they will not arbitrarily increase the school fees. It will be decided by the State School Regulatory Authority for a period of three years.
- Under the leadership of Prime Minister, a new top body "National Commission of Education" will be established, which will be responsible for

the development, implementation, evaluation and implementation of appropriate approach of education on a continuous basis.

- The contribution of ancient Indian knowledge systems will be ensured for mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, medicine in school.
- In addition to increasing the number of Indian institutions abroad, the top 200 universities in the world will be allowed to establish their branches in India.

#### **What is the Kasturirangan committee?**

- The Human Resource Development Ministry (MHRD) formed the Kasturirangan Committee for the New Education Policy (NEP) in June 2017.
- There were 11 members in this committee. Earlier, the government had constituted the TSR Subramanian Committee in 2015, on the new education policy, but the government did not consider the recommendation of the committee.
- Kasturirangan is the former chairman of Indian Space Research Organization ISRO.

#### **Schemes for education**

- For elementary education - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan - 2001, samgrah siksha, Mid Day Meal Scheme - 1995
- Padhe bharat bahde bharat - 2014
- Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) - 2009
- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) 2013

Committee

### Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

**Q. Consider the following statements-**

1. New Education Policy has been prepared under the chairmanship of Kasturirangan.
2. Under the recent draft of amended education policy school students have to study three languages.
3. In the draft of new education policy, Master degree or three year graduation degree is necessary for P.H.D.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

### Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

**Q.1 Which points have been emphasised to reform the education system in the recently released draft of National Education policy, 2019? Examine.**

(250Words)

**Note:** Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 14 June is 1 (c)

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