

NEW EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA: PROPOSITIONS AND PROMISES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Aryadeep Roychoudhury

Post Graduate Department of Biotechnology, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), 30, Mother Teresa Sarani, Kolkata – 700016, West Bengal, India.

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Corresponding author:

Roychoudhury, A.
aryadeep.rc@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The National Policy on Education, 2020 has been framed with the main objective of making a paradigm shift, so as to bring about a holistic approach in education with several reformations. It will aim at diverting the education system from teacher-centric to learner-centric approach. One of the radical changes proposed by this policy is the introduction of outcome-based education which would be multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature where students can choose their own disciplines and earn academic credits from multiple institutions. Emphasis will be given on flexible curricular structure and strengthening the creative thinking and cognitive skills of the students. Blended learning, also referred to as hybrid or mixed mode learning, will be followed via the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools that will combine face to face classroom sessions with digital technology. This model, also called the Pull model of learning, will have learners in the center with the teachers creating a proper environment of learning from several options. The teachers will therefore act as facilitators and mentors, rather than mere instructors of learning. The new education policy promises to fill up several lacunae of the present education system and enable creating sustainable manpower, who will be better problem-solvers and decision makers and have greater moral values and respect for indigenous and traditional culture of India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The new education policy, also referred to as the National Policy on Education, 2020 (third education policy in India so far), has been proposed after almost 34 years (the last policy was introduced in the year 1986). This policy claims to make a paradigm shift, so as to bring about a holistic approach in education with several reformations. It will aim at diverting the education system from teacher-centric to learner-centric approach, focusing on hands-on-learning ("learning by doing"), equipping the students with the skills required to stride forward in the 21st century, with a flexible curricular designing and choice-based credit system (CBCS) in its true spirit. The policy has four specific aims: (i) holistic; (ii) multidisciplinary; (iii) skill development and (iv) research. The goal is also to end fragmentation of higher education by setting up large interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary university and college hubs, promoting research-intensive universities with a more liberal undergraduate education system and moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy. It aims at phasing out affiliations to the colleges by the respective University within the next 15 years, so that colleges will enjoy full academic autonomy. The policy has also emphasized the implementation of regional languages at the higher education level and recommended drafting of textbooks in regional languages, so that students get the option to study and take their examinations in their mother tongue. Another important focus is on technology integration, which implies more usage of online and digital resources, ensuring equitable use of technology. The overall goal of education will be not just to make the students employable, but align the goals of quality with affordability and sustainability.

2. PROBLEMS WITH THE -

PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA

The major challenges, presently encountered in the higher education system in India, constitute fragmentation of educational institutions, with lack of autonomy on the part of both institutes and teachers. The disciplines are rigidly separated and compartmentalized with inadequate research and funding across disciplines. Equity of access is also lacking, meaning that the students in the socio-economically challenged areas do not have equal access or opportunity to education. Moreover, the entire education, starting from the school level, is knowledge-based, with poor learning outcomes which do not sharpen the basic skills of the students. Only 15% of the non-professional graduates are appropriately employed, whereas only 25% of the engineering graduates are fit for being hired for any job (International Labor Organization 2020). Skill gaps are prominently visualized with regard to cyber security, artificial intelligence, robotics, cloud computing, analytics and mobile applications. Student engagement and equipping them with knowledge, skill and attitude with continuous refinement in curriculum and creation of Open Educational Resources (OERs) are among the other challenges of the 21st century education systems. Education is not simply meant for imparting knowledge and generating employment, but it should develop creative individuals with economic independence, so as to build up a progressive and prosperous nation. The purpose of education is also to influence the thought processes, feelings and actions of students. There are in fact four pillars of an ideal education structure: (i) learning to 'know' (mastering tools to knowledge); (ii) learning to 'do' (competence to deal with different situations with a team-work aptitude); (iii) learning to 'live' together (understanding oneself

and others) and (iv) learning to 'be' (explore and uncover the hidden talents or potentials). It is apparent that the current education system largely meets criteria (i), but fails to sufficiently fulfill the other three criteria. Moreover, there is a lack of availability of proper textbooks in regional languages, especially at the higher education level; therefore, students face difficulty in communication. Considering all these facts, it is quite imperative that the education system needs some sort of changes or transformational reforms. The New Education Policy, drafted in the year 2020, aims to fulfill some of the goals and bring about multidimensional changes in several spheres of the present education system.

3. OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION

This is an education approach that focuses on the objectives and attributes or outcomes of a learner after completion of any academic program. The desired outcomes are first designed before initiating the program curriculum and teaching process. Learning Outcomes (LOs) refer to the statement, knowledge, skill and ability or expertise that an individual learner should possess from the learning process and can demonstrate that efficiently after the learning process is complete. Therefore, setting up LOs is highly important for any curriculum. The LOs should be specific and well-defined, realistic and attainable, observable and measurable, as well as clear and concise. They should be framed in terms of overall program goals, rather than specific course objectives. Moreover, these outcomes should be judged and reviewed not in terms of the intention of the faculty, but with regard to the ability, developmental levels and expected performance of the students. The LOs should be action-oriented and in tune with the course goals, appropriate for the level of the learner. While framing the LOs, care should be taken so as to address not only the intellectual skills -

(understanding the concepts), but also the cognitive strategy (creative thinking), psychomotor skills (performance of actions), verbal communications and last but not least, the attitude (behavior) and values.

Learning outcomes encompass Program Outcomes (general qualities that the students of all professional and general programs are required to attain at the time of graduation), Program-specific Outcome (qualities attained by the students of a specific professional or general program, hence discipline-based) and Course Outcomes. Some of the key elements of the Program Outcome are critical thinking, environment and sustainability, ethics, global perspective, aesthetic engagement and effective citizenship. Such POs should be based on the inputs of the external stakeholders. The COs should also be mapped to POs. While designing the curriculum, one should be careful that the students learn well, instructional activities are designed and conducted to facilitate them to acquire knowledge and demonstrate, and the assessment is aligned with what the learners are expected to do. Finally, all the Outcomes need to be measured through proper assessment.

4. REVISED BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Benjamin Samuel Bloom, an educational psychologist, who made remarkable contributions in recognizing educational objectives, provided a framework consisting of six major tiers of education, viz., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. However, in 2001, a revision of Bloom's Taxonomy was proposed by a group of cognitive psychologists (Anderson and Krathwohl, *et al.*, 2001) which was based on more dynamic mode of classification where verbs (action words) and gerunds, instead of nouns, were used to label their categories and subcategories (Figure 1), as shown below:

Bloom's Taxonomy

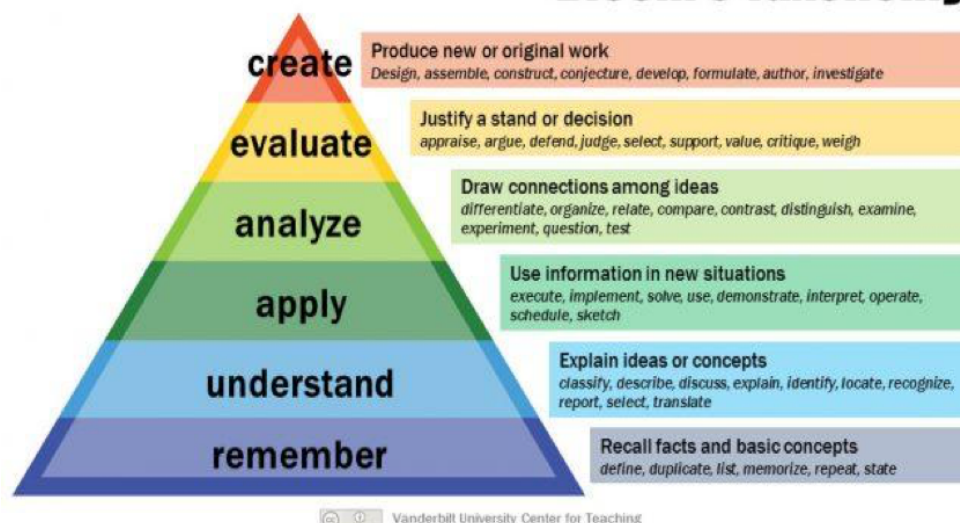


Figure 1. Hierarchical tiers of learning, as proposed in the pyramid of education, based on revised Bloom's taxonomy [Extracted from Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching (Creative Commons Attribution license)]

The above model clearly shows that learning at a higher level is totally dependent on attainment of prerequisite knowledge and skill at lower levels. Hence, the learning process of any course in an ideal educational system should start from the base of the pyramid and finally reach the topmost tier before completion of the course. Unfortunately, the higher education system in India is chiefly focused on assessing the two lower parameters, viz., remember and understand, without judging much the upper four parameters of the learner. The New Education Policy, 2020 has proposed an examination reform policy where the assessment of the higher order cognitive skills of the learner should be emphasized, so as to promote higher order thinking. Instead of only a summative form of assessment, formative and even cognitive assessment should be given more importance. The parameters like deeper and critical thinking, analytical and creative capabilities should be considered during assessment and evaluation systems. Moreover, COs need to be assessed both directly (in the form of semester examinations, assignments, orals, etc.) and indirectly (through course evaluation, student/ alumni/ faculty/

employer surveys, stakeholder forms, strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis, etc.). New pedagogical tools are to be developed and applied in teaching that can test the creativity of the students, so that they can apply their knowledge in day-to-day problems. Such a mode of teaching-learning will supposedly open up the possibility of self-employment as well.

5. ACADEMIC BANK OF CREDITS

This is a digital/online/virtual entity of academic service, ensuring academic flexibility and student-centric approach of the education system, encompassing the mode of credit recognition, credit consolidation, credit transfer and credit redemption. This system will act as a National Academic Depository (NAD) that will provide facilities to the students to open individual academic bank accounts for accumulation of academic credits earned by them. In addition, these credits may be acquired by them from multiple Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), viz., university, autonomous college, deemed to be university, affiliated -

college, etc. that has attained at least 'A' grade from National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and is a member or partner institution under Academic Bank of Credits (ABCs) model. The credits can therefore be earned from two or more such institutions with one host institution (which will award the degree or diploma), instead of the current mode where a student earns all the credits from a single institute within a stipulated time span. Thus, there will be an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary and an interchangeable curricular structure or collaborative approach that will bring forth academic mobility in the form of credit transfer. The credit system will be choice-based in the true sense where the students can choose the best combinations of courses or disciplines according to their needs or goals of life, along with multiple entry and exit facilities. This will satisfy students' quest of knowledge in which they take keen interest, and provide more flexibility to customize the learning process. Another advantage will be that this system will remove rigid academic background, opening possibilities of self-paced learning within a longer time frame according to one's own choice. The participating Institutes will maintain a dynamic website where the details of ABC operational mechanism need to be disclosed.

6. DIGITAL LEARNING

Recommendations have also been made regarding blended learning, viz., concepts of hybrid (intermediate between classroom teaching and a complete online learning environment) or mixed mode. Blended learning is an instructional methodology and implies integration of interactive technology with conventional classroom settings and appears superior to traditional classrooms, since it allows teachers to deliver instructions in asynchronous and differentiated manner. The teachers will act as facilitator, coach and mentor of learning, rather than merely imparting knowledge. The -

teachers will develop Blended learning, based on subjects, learners' needs and curriculum requirements. They are expected to act as classroom planners (plan the entire curriculum well in advance, for long term), content developer (by interlinking online and offline elements and preparing the contents in different formats), classroom managers (set appropriate norms and learning-checkpoints, and engage all the learners with different tactics, via micro-content, variety of activities and collaboration among students), and as facilitators and evaluators of learning. The real objective of Blended learning will be to make the learning process impactful, engaging and interesting.

Several types of Blended learning structures have been proposed, viz., blended face to face class (also termed as face to face driver model), blended online class (also called online driver model), flipped classroom, rotation model and self-blended model, each having their own merits and demerits. The concept of flipped classroom (inverting a classroom), a "pedagogy first" approach, was developed in 2007 by two high school chemistry teachers, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams. Students in flipped classrooms listen to the lectures online, well in advance, before coming to the traditional classroom for activities like group works and projects. Thus, it is well understood that the lower tiers like remembering and understanding in the pyramid of revised Bloom's taxonomy could be performed outside the classroom, whereas actions like apply, analyze, evaluate and create, could be undertaken within the classroom. Therefore, the new education policy focuses upon increased student engagement in the class with better acquisition of critical thinking or creative problem-solving skills and enhancing learning receptivity. Such forms of Blended learning will be facilitated through the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools like powerpoint presentation, video lectures of 15-30 minutes,

E-portfolios, learning management systems like Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), etc. The policy also highlights the use of creative commons, Open Educational Resources (OERs) that will further facilitate the online learning processes. Thus, the new education system will probably enable students to be independent and self-directed learners who could be more confident in problem solving and handling case studies. However, this will adequately demand implementation of novel and alternative pedagogical tools to change the teaching landscape and move beyond the scope of traditional classrooms. Moreover, teachers need to monitor whether the online study materials that are shared are meticulously viewed and studied by the learners.

7. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The policy also ensures proper monitoring, support and quality assurance of Higher Education Institutions which should take special note of (i) curriculum design and development, (ii) academic flexibility, (iii) curriculum enrichment and (iv) proper feedback system. Adequate infrastructure and learning resources should be created for learner support and progression. The policy also highlights the importance of institution vision and leadership, strategy development and deployment, proper financial management and resource mobilization, active Internal Quality Assurance Cell, and particularly faculty empowerment strategy, which, unfortunately, is sometimes lacking even in some well-reputed Higher Educational Institutes.

8. CONCLUSION

Education in the true sense reflects exercising of mind, body and heart, and has two facets, viz., it should enable a person not only to earn livelihood, but also make a person equipped with all the elements that are necessary for the

entire journey of life. The real joy within us comes from sharing and being unconditionally free, as well as through mutual cooperation and moving together with a community spirit. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, following the ideologies of Upanishads and Vedas, established Visva-Bharati University (Santiniketan Ashram) with the same objective that the Institute will hold the flag of Indian tradition, fulfilling the quest of holistic knowledge which is far more important than mere materialistic pursuits, yet be an institute of international standards. The aesthetic aspects of life, including one's own culture, sheer spiritual exercise and deep association with Mother Nature were some of the major pillars and foundation stones of the University that Tagore had dreamt of, all throughout his sacred life. His vision of education, which was a perfect blend of the East and West, is actually what we feel to be of utmost necessity even in the present context. The new education policy promises to fill up several lacunae of the present education system; time will speak as to what extent it can bring radical transformations in the present education system in the long run, following the footsteps and philosophy of Tagore.

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