

January 2019

# **CURRICULUM REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY**

**BASTION MEDIA LLP**



Written by: Tanvi Mehta

Edited by: Aarathi Ganesan, Chirag Chinnappa

# Curriculum Reform Recommendations for the National Education Policy

- Statistics<sup>1</sup> show that the problem lies not only in budget allocation but also within the disparities in state expenditure – the gap between the expenditures of those states that prioritize education most and those for whom it is lowest on the list is growing. This becomes a primary concern in observing a direct correlation between education expenditure per student and the level of academic performance. A similar relationship can be seen between the basic infrastructure provided to schools and students' academic performance. Thus, perhaps the most direct way to improve the efficiency of education expenditure is to standardize the resources provided to schools across states.
- TARL – Teaching at the Right Level is a method developed collaboratively by J-PAL and Pratham. It addresses learning needs by accounting for the differences between a student's grade level and the level at which they stand with respect to their peers<sup>2</sup>.
- Ideally, the national education system would rely far less on external, terminal assessment and more on a formative system (i.e. one that accounts for the student's performance year-round instead of simply on one day a year). This would integrate the role of the teacher as well, and take off the often lethal pressure of the board or terminal examination<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Agarwal, Anmol, and Sujan Bandyopadhyay. "India's Education Quandary: Learning from Learning Outcomes." *Ideas For India*, 10 Dec. 2018, [www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/india-s-education-quandary-learning-from-learning-outcomes.html](http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/india-s-education-quandary-learning-from-learning-outcomes.html).

<sup>2</sup> Banerji, Rukmini, and Esther Duflo. "Teaching at the Right Level: Solutions for Low Learning Levels in India." *Ideas For India*, 26 Nov. 2015, [www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/teaching-at-the-right-level-solutions-for-low-learning-levels-in-india.html](http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/human-development/teaching-at-the-right-level-solutions-for-low-learning-levels-in-india.html).

<sup>3</sup> "Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes." Central Square Foundation, [centralsquarefoundation.org/edresource/evaluation-and-assessment-frameworks-for-improving-school-outcomes-2/](http://centralsquarefoundation.org/edresource/evaluation-and-assessment-frameworks-for-improving-school-outcomes-2/).

- The British Council, in collaboration with the government of Nepal, has undertaken the Examination Reform Project<sup>4</sup>, one of the aims of which is to develop new, fairer assessment methodologies that rethink the idea of effective education and outcome standards while remaining efficient, reliable, transparent and positive. Some of the measures they undertook for the same were: a new letter grading system (reduces the emphasis on the exact mark a student achieves, taking away the pressure to know each piece of information; this would also account for how difficult the task was rather than scoring the candidate against an unquestionable assessment).
- The wordings of questions must be changed to ask students to perform more than just a simple recollection of facts, students should be asked to think on multiple levels (i.e. identification, comprehension and analysis: recollection of basic concepts, understanding how they interact with other concepts, and navigating the system they have learned in terms of evaluation or strategy – the last of which usually has no correct answer)<sup>5</sup>.
- Some ways in which this can be done by asking i) whether a statement is consistent with a principle/system, ii) providing multiple pieces of evidence and asking which system they most likely belong to, iii) interpret charts or graphs. While these methods are seen in current examination systems, they often rely on the same information every year. Thus questions cannot be simply lifted out of the same bank every year; they must be modified or rewritten, dynamic enough to ensure that answers and manipulation of information cannot be learned by rote but instead, processes are understood.
- Longer, essay-style questions can also be asked, (requiring students to organize and integrate information, interpret information, construct arguments, give explanations, evaluate the merit of ideas, and carry out other types of reasoning – and then communicate their ideas in the best possible way) with no set limit to what information the answer is based on. Thus, any valid, logically and factually consistent answer can be considered correct within this framework. Not only will this compel students (and evaluators) to think actively about the information they are processing, but

<sup>4</sup> "Examination Reform Project." Report: Role of English in Skills Development in South Asia | British Council, [www.britishcouncil.org/np/programmes/examreform](http://www.britishcouncil.org/np/programmes/examreform).

<sup>5</sup> Dickinson, Mike. "Writing Multiple-Choice Questions for Higher-Level Thinking." Learning Solutions Magazine, 5 Dec. 2011, [www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/804/writing-multiple-choice-questions-for-higher-level-thinking](http://www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/804/writing-multiple-choice-questions-for-higher-level-thinking).

it will also allow for a more inclusive, fluid system that accounts for and allows the understanding of different socio-political positions of students.

- While knowing some amount of information is still important, this can be achieved, not by repetition or similar techniques like mnemonics, but instead by asking a student to repeatedly use the information or to build on it to create a network of related information.
- For assessment to be truly effective, it must rely on curricula that are designed to be as fluid and open as it is. Thus, textbooks must, instead of focusing on manifestations of phenomena, attempt to teach students styles of approaching a problem in different disciplines (functional approach vs. content based). Thus, when they are asked questions in an exam, it is not the content that will matter but the way the student answers the problem. This system will thus rely on well-written textbooks, properly trained, alert and accountable teachers, and a foundational system that is transparent and rigorous.
- To allow the curriculum to be more open, MHRD can create a platform through which curriculum and examinations are collectively written by teachers (who can be qualified through an assessment process based on experience and an evaluation of performance), perhaps through the submission of questions or sample curricula, and then moderated by dedicated authorities. Assessments could also be carried out through this, where the central authority would simply collect and redistribute papers to qualified teachers around the country for evaluation. This would ensure inclusivity/maximum accessibility as well as dynamism in the content and nature of pedagogy and learning.