

Report/Minutes of the Roundtable on Education Reforms

1. Background

India's education policy dates back to 1986 and was subsequently modified in the year 1992. Much has changed since then. Rapid development brought in by liberalisation has dramatically changed the aspirations of people. Education is considered a crucial conduit to meet the expectations of growing and young demography of India.

Accordingly, the government has sought suggestions on different thematic areas under the two broad heads namely school education and higher education. It is in this backdrop that CUTS International Public Policy Centre (CIPPoC) organised the first in the series of stakeholder consultations on education reforms with the purpose to arrive at informed recommendations on some of the identified themes.

The consultations were held in the form of a roundtable on 17th February 2015 in Jaipur and was chaired by Professor Vijay Vyas, Professor Emeritus, Institute of Development Studies. The participants included noted educationists from Rajasthan and other relevant stakeholders. (*List of participants is provided in the last section of this report*)

2 Summary of discussions along with recommendations in light of relevant context (*Please note that separate research has been done to establish the context for recommendations. Therefore the 'context' section under each point was not necessarily discussed exactly in the way it is written*)

3.1 Monopoly by affiliating universities

Context: According to a 2014 report of the British Council titled "*The future of higher education and opportunities for international cooperation*", the vast bulk of students study at public and private colleges which are affiliated to state universities. Therefore, if there is one overall structure which defines Indian higher education, it is the affiliated college system. These colleges do not have their own degree awarding powers but they deliver the courses, curricula and examinations specified and regulated by their parent state university. The affiliated college sector is huge, enrolling over 90% of undergraduates, 70% of postgraduates and 17% of doctoral students.

To make matters worse there is monopoly of state universities in their respective jurisdiction. As a result, a college which may wish to get affiliation from a better and higher ranking university cannot do so, adversely affecting the quality of education and ultimately the students.

Recommendation: Government must consider this issue and should allow freedom to colleges to get affiliated to the University of their choice. This will facilitate competition and is expected to improve the quality of education.

3.2 Issue of revenue raising powers vis-s-vis public universities and autonomy

Context: Public universities (especially state universities) depend on affiliation fees paid by the colleges for their survival, which in turn is supplemented by state government funding to pay salaries and little else.

As a consequence, most universities have poor infrastructure and conduct little research, although pockets of excellence exist. This is exacerbated by the fact that many state universities spend much of their time administering the exams and admissions to their affiliated colleges.

In other countries like the US, public universities have full autonomy. There is no body even remotely resembling the UGC in India that controls public or private universities from afar. Consequently, public universities are not hamstrung in their ability to compete against their rivals, whether private or public. In effect, it means that public universities have considerable flexibility in setting fees. In view of the subsidy from the state government, the fee charged is substantial as compared to the private universities. The fees ensure that universities have the necessary resources to attract first rate scholars for appointments to their staff and establish labs and other infrastructure¹.

Regarding other issues pertaining to autonomy, it was expressed in the roundtable that the issue of over regulation is a big concern.

Recommendation: There should be certain flexibility for public universities to raise funds, for instance by hiking fee. This would enable the universities to upgrade the infrastructure and invest required funds for quality enhancement.

It was also recommended that one of the other effective ways to facilitate the autonomy of institutions is by providing for a 'negative list' in their regulation.

Further, to increase the financial availability for the university, cross subsidisation should be allowed across components like tax and fee.

3.3 Issue of integration of skill training with the overall education system

Context: The current population of India is 1.2 billion and is expected to rise to 1.8 billion by 2045, which in turn is indicative of the fact that there would be an increase in the working age (15-64 yrs) population².

According to a study by CII-Planning Commission, it has been projected that 2/3rd of the jobs will be for low-end skills. This brings out the importance of imparting vocational training to a large number of youth enabling them to get access to skill-based employment³.

On 27th December 2013, in line with the National Skill Development Policy 2009 - Government of India announced National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). Essentially, it organises qualifications according to levels of knowledge, skill and aptitude with levels defined in terms of learning outcomes whether acquired through formal, informal or non-formal learning.

The framework was designed keeping in mind benefits for school, vocational educational qualifications, Higher education institutions, accreditation authority and industry. Broadly the purpose of NSQF is to establish nationally standardised and internationally acceptable qualification while solving issues such as equivalence of certificates/ diplomas/degrees, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation to enable students to move between education, vocational training and work at different stages in their lives according to their needs and convenience. This will allow a student to leave education domain get practical experience and pursue studies again⁴.

¹ India : The Emerging Giant: The Emerging Giant By Arvind Panagariya and Jagdish Bhagwati

² <http://www.nsdcindia.org/pdf/building-trainers-skills.pdf>

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http://www.bable.in/Knowledge%20Bank/NSDC%20Reports/NSDC_Building%20Trainers%20Skill%20in%20Vocational%20Employability.pdf

⁴ http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NSQF%20NOTIFICATION.pdf

NSQF would require overarching regulator like UGC, AICTE, NCVT, School Boards etc to define each of their entry and exit parameters so that vertical progression can be strengthened.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has been working with the State governments of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan for the implementation of the framework through its Sector Skill Councils.⁵

Recommendation: The government has announced that it will carry out reforms in education regulators like UGC, AICTE etc.⁶ In addition, government is also well on its way to announce a new skill development policy.

Therefore, careful review of NSQF which is based on the 2009 skill policy and existing regulatory environment must be undertaken to align it with the new policy. Inputs and insights from states like Haryana which has lessons to offer on National Vocational Educational Qualification Framework (NVEQF), later subsumed with NSQF must be taken on board.

Separately, there are reforms needed elsewhere for the best outcome of skill training. This requires focus on attrition rate after placements, which in part is also due to low low salaries/wages.

3.4 Need to have choice based credit system (CBCS) across all disciplines

Context: Under CBCS, students will be able to pursue three types of courses -foundation, elective and core. Students can pursue core subjects every semester and are free to pick electives from a pool of subjects unrelated to their disciplines. For example, a computer science student can still opt for history as an elective. A study of varied subjects widens students' horizon and exposure⁷.

Keeping in mind that individual universities might not have the necessary faculty for elective subjects, the government has created a framework for credit transfer between institutes, where students can transfer credits from one university to another as credits will be recognised by every university.

To strengthen this system, credit transfers can either be lateral or vertical, that is, at the same or higher level, respectively.

Recommendation: CBCS should be available for all disciplines. It was expressed in the roundtable that CBCS is currently available only for engineering disciplines. Additionally, it would require shift from annual system to semester system.

3.5 Need to improve systems in order to improve the outcome

Context: On June 10th, 2014 a joint article by Ashish Dhawan, Anu Aga & Amit Chandra in the Times of India⁸ categorically stated that Indian education system is mediocre. Amongst others, increased access to larger base of students was cited as a contributing factor to mediocrity.

⁵ <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/states/nsdc-looking-at-highgrowth-potential-sectors/article6708147.ece>

⁶ <http://www.firstpost.com/india/govt-reviewing-key-regulators-like-ugc-aicte-education-reforms-smriti-irani-1801663.html>

⁷ http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-19/news/59305322_1_cbc-credit-transfer-credit-system

⁸ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/Letter-to-Smriti-Irani-Five-steps-to-take-Indias-education-system-from-mediocre-to-world-class/articleshow/36312444.cms>

While the stated intention behind this is to make education more accessible, an inherent risk is that it lowers the entry bar.

In other words, it can lower the benchmark of achievement. Perhaps this explains why islands of excellence are few amidst the ocean of mediocrity.

Recommendation: Given the above, it is a fact that most students and teachers available are mediocre. This calls for innovation to improve the quality of students and teaching to increase the standards. One way to do that is by bettering the systems involved in delivery of education. This includes teacher education and development, ICT in education, assessments, curriculum changes, exposure visits etc.

With respect to improving the quality it was recommended that focus on faculty, infrastructure and technology should be proportionate. In this regard, Wipro's 10X initiative was cited as a successful example. The initiative has been explained in brief below:

Mission10X is a not-for-profit trust of Wipro, launched on September 5, 2007, to address the challenges of employability of Engineering graduates by enhancing the quality of engineering education. It aims to achieve this by collaborating with academicians & leading educational institutions across the country. The Mission10X Learning Approach empowers engineering faculty with innovative teaching techniques using which they can help learners in imbibing higher level of understanding of subjects, application of concepts learned and development of key behavioral skills.

Mission10X adopted an innovative approach with a three-pronged emphasis on empowering faculty, developing transformative academic leaders and leveraging technology.

In pursuit of excellence in Engineering education through innovation, Mission 10X aims to enhance the employability skills of the engineering graduates in India through:

1. Faculty Empowerment Workshops for

a) Teaching faculty in Engineering Colleges

b) Teaching faculty in Science Colleges

2. Academic Leadership Workshops for Principals and Directors in Engineering colleges

3. Unified Technology Learning Platform

a) Learning Framework

4. Aarambh

a) E-learning Philosophy

3.6 Need for quality assurance system – can accreditation be the answer?

Context: With respect to checking quality through regulation, it may be noted that one of the failures of centralised system to move ahead in timely fashion relates to quality assurance system.

The National Education Policy 1986 recommended putting such a system in place. But it was only in 1994 that the accreditation body, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) came into existence. It took another four years to accredit the first institution.

Later, UGC adopted the policy that accreditation will have no implication for funding and salaries. This took away substantive value from accreditation.⁹

⁹ India : The Emerging Giant: The Emerging Giant By Arvind Panagariya and Jagdish Bhagwati

Recommendation: It was suggested that accreditation now-a-days is based on strict review of quality. It was added that in fact now a days accreditation is mission oriented which means that institutions have to articulate the mission very clearly which is reviewed in a strict manner by accreditation authorities. This needs to be followed in all sincerity across all institutions and a timely review is needed.

3.7 Need to determine ‘useful knowledge’ in the present context

Context: The concern with “useful knowledge” was first expressed in the colonial period, then in the context of a developmentalist state, and now in the context of globalization.¹⁰ By implication it means that curriculum at school as well as higher education level is subject to change as per changing times.

Recommendation: It was recommended that government of India and the state governments must engage in a shared narrative to identify what is useful knowledge at different levels. This will require a sustained and collaborative effort.

3.8 Need to improve the research and innovation

Context: One of the ways to measure the rigorousness of research and innovation in a country is by looking at its patent filings. The Indian government has also been indicating that it is keen to see an increase in domestic patent filings across all industry sectors and technology areas.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation’s (WIPO) IP Indicators report for 2013 revealed that of the 43,663 patents applications made in India in 2012-2013, only 22% were filed by domestic entities. “Domestic filings need to be increased by encouraging research and development in India...”¹¹

Recommendation: There is a need to develop a culture of intense research at the university level. In other words, universities should be seen as laboratories of research. One way to improve this is by creating a tenure system for the University lecturers and linking their tenure with a certain research output.

3.9 Need to have community participation

Context: Communities are strategic in a variety of ways towards the provision and management of education as well as teaching, learning and enforcement processes. They play a variety of roles in the enhancement of democratic practice and stability. They can be involved in the promotion and management of education as well as the development of the capacity of other communities to assume increased role in handling the entire education environments towards enhanced funding, management and monitoring under democratic settings. Community participation in education and democratic participation must be inherently connected to each other for expansion of educational and other services.

Recommendation: It was recommended that community participation must be improved. In this regard, it may be noted that under RTE, a provision of School Managing Committees (SMC) has been provided for. Amongst other things, SMCs are supposed to develop school management plans with

¹⁰ <http://cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2008-06-03.1760543509/file>

¹¹ <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/LkKhP62yJrhSRJZDoqDIiN/Indias-patent-problems.html>

parents. But quite often, it has been observed that SMCs don't work optimally and the level of information about SMC is minimal amongst community participants¹². This needs to be bolstered.

3.10 Need to have a Common University Act

Context: The issue of Common University Act is one of the most hotly contested issue in the education sphere in India. Currently, there are several universities working within a state under different Universities Acts. This means they follow different rules leading to administrative difficulty.

Therefore, need to have a common varsity act have been often expressed. On the other hand, stiff opposition has come from some stakeholders in places like UP and Gujarat on the need to have Common Universities Act for those states.

This is primarily due to the fear that Common University Act would bereft Universities of whatever autonomy they have. For instance, in Gujarat, as of 2009, universities had about 80 per cent autonomy. Therefore fears of increase in government's influence were rampant.¹³

The same reason has been quoted by the student union of the Aligarh Muslim University against the implementation of Common University Act.¹⁴

Recommendation: It was recommended that Common University Act must be brought in other states as well. In this regard, it may be pertinent to mention that lessons should be learnt from states which already have such acts and at the same time state specific issues and apprehension must be taken on board before introducing a Common University Act.

3.11 Need to align Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) with new education policy and reforms

Context: Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 that aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions. The central funding (in the ratio of 65:35 for general category States and 90:10 for special category states) that would be norm based and outcome dependent, would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions. The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state's strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.

Recommendation: A suggestion was also made that there is a need to critically review National Mission on Higher Education or Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and align it with unprecedented focus of the current government on empowering states. Accordingly there is a need to review the State Higher Education Councils created under the National Policy on Education, 1986 and also to assess the RUSA scheme (created in 2013) in the current context and align it with upcoming new education policy. In addition, it was also felt that there needs to be a platform to share best practices across states as some states perform better than other and there is a need for states to learn from each other.

3.12 Need to regulate coaching institutions

¹² <http://www.accountabilityindia.in/accountabilityblog/2522-empowering-school-management-committees-helping-smc-members-plan-better>

¹³ <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/common-universities-act-fresh-protests-over-vcs--meeting-on-mar-23/437267/>

¹⁴ <http://twocircles.net/2014nov14/1415979248.html#.VO69FPmUfjU>

Context: Private coaching institutes are Rs 35,000 crore businesses in India today¹⁵. It is a fact that learning levels substantially improve in private tuitions. Private tuitions at the moment are an unregulated business. Teachers with spare time tutor students after school, and tuition centres coach students on how to clear specific exams (SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc).

In this background, the debate persists whether or not such tuitions should be regularised. A view in favour of regularising the coaching/ private tuitions suggests that since the students are being tutored by their own teachers, the teaching in school and outside can progress hand-in-hand. Thus, the child's progress can be closely monitored and the tuition sessions can be tailored to the child's needs without hampering the progress of the rest of the class.

Recommendation: It was recommended that instead of recognising coaching, attempts should be made to improve teaching in schools.

3.13 Need to focus on pre-primary schooling

Context: Pre-primary education is a crucial component for child's education. In the Indian context a majority of pre-primary schooling happens in aaganwadi centres. But more often than not these centres do not have necessary equipments. Worse still, many aaganwadi centres do not have buildings. They operate either in the open or in rented houses. Also many times, the frontline women workers at the aaganwadi centres do not have adequate training.

Recommendation: Recommendation was made that due focus must be accorded to the aaganwadis in India as they can be crucial in improving the ability of quick uptake of students when they move to elementary level.

4 List of Participants in alphabetical order

S.No.	Name	Particulars
1.	A. K. Sacheti	Project Adviser Rajasthan Skill and Livelihoods Development Corporation (RSLDC)
2.	Abhishek Kumar	Associate Director CUTS International
3.	Abhishek Poddar	Director Kamla Poddar Group of Institutes
4.	Archana Surana	Founder & Director Arch Academy of Design
5.	Ashok Bapna	President NHRDN
6.	Ayush Poddar	Director Kamla Poddar Group of Institutes
7.	Benoy Thoompunkal	Designer Arch Academy of Design
8.	Bipul Chatterjee	Deputy Executive Director CUTS International

¹⁵ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/states-not-centre-should-regulate-coaching-centres-hrd-ministry-files-affidavit-in-supreme-court/article6332125.ece>

9.	Devi Singh	Vice Chancellor JK Lakshmipat University
10.	Kulbhushan Kothari	Managing Trustee PRATHAM
11.	Kumkum Garg	Dean, Faculty of Engineering Manipal University
12.	Madhusudan Sharma	Senior Project Coordinator CUTS International
13.	Naresh Dadhich	Officiating Director Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
14.	Pradeep S Mehta	Secretary General CUTS International
15.	Pramod Yadav	Director, Administration & Projects Arch Academy of Design
16.	S. L. Kothari	Professor & Director Institute of Biotechnology Amity University
17.	S. M. Seth	Chairman Poornima University
18.	Sunny Sebastian	Vice Chancellor Haridev Joshi University of Journalism & Mass Communication
19.	Sushil Kumar	Assistant Director Micro Small Medium Enterprises Development Institute (MSME)
20.	TCA Sharad Raghavan	Data Journalist HT Mint
21.	V. S. Vyas (CHAIR)	Professor Emeritus Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
22.	Vijay Vir Singh	Professor & Head Department of Economics University of Rajasthan