



Management, Administration and Governance of School Education in India: Proposed National Education Policy

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The National Policy in Education (1986) and the modifications made to the policy (1992) were key initiatives that attempted to enunciate a comprehensive framework that would guide the development of education in the Nation. These were landmark documents as they attempted to highlight the need for quality, equitable education for all and provided broad suggestions as to how education could be resourced, the kinds of programmes that could be implemented to help improve the status of teachers and the profession of teaching and suggestions for better management and governance of the very large public education system. The importance of a decentralized administrative system that was responsive to the needs of the community and was accountable to the larger public for the quality of education provided in public schools were the central tenets of the 1986 and 92 policy on Education.

Almost twenty five years after the last National policy on education was released, a new education policy has been proposed and it is useful to examine the manner in which ideas of 'management' and 'governance' are visualised in the proposed policy. Two key documents are available in the public domain as part of the public discourse on the proposed Policy on Education 2016. The first is the Report of the committee for Evolution of the New Education policy 2016, steered by T S R Subramanian and the second document is MHRD report titled "Some inputs for Draft National Education Policy 2016". Both these documents provide insights into the thinking and perspectives that have shaped the recommendations around the management, administration and governance of education in the country, specifically school education.

The key points made in the report of the committee for Evolution of the New Education policy 2016 are that the education system in the country is in disarray and the policy should focus primarily on improving the quality of education and restoring the credibility of the education system and that a great deal of the current inefficiencies in the system is because of political interference in the administering of the system across all levels (school to higher education). The report identified that

there were "serious gaps in teacher motivation and training, sub-optimal personnel management in the education sector, absence of necessary attention to monitoring and supervision of performance at all levels – in short an overall neglect of management issues in this field have contributed to the current state of affairs." (pg. 34). The committee's report set out to address this issue of lack of credibility in the education system and lack of optimal performance of stakeholders in the system by seeking to "usher in effective management mechanism into education" (section 5.1.6) and to "establish impersonal systems designed to ensure oversight of the work of Principals and teachers – in short management at the school level.

The desire of the committee to reduce political interference within the education system and to bring in greater efficiencies has led the committee to recommend that a managerial approach with strengthened control and supervisory mechanisms, tied tightly to the notion of accountability (particularly accountability of teachers and principals in school education) be taken. To that extent, the committee has recommended in section 5.1.17 that "all aspects in the hierarchy be reviewed to bring about transparency, clear-cut criteria in operations, establishment of open systems, independent outside verification to ensure compliance; and use of Information Technology appropriately to achieve the above; build an effective quality monitoring system, linking the schools on hierarchical management system, at the block / district / state level; establish new transparent system for approval, affiliation and regular evaluation of new institutions, with transparent processes, based on clearly established principles, with full public disclosure and bring accountability at each level of operation.

These three pillars of New Public Management (Buschor, 1994) – transparency, accountability and efficiency of operations are tied together by the committee's hope of "appropriate use of Information Technology in every aspect of governance of the sector" with the committee stating that it is "satisfied that if substantive steps on the above mentioned lines are taken, the

quality of governance will sharply improve, with consequent significant enhancement in the quality of education.” (pg. 42). The committee places great confidence in ICT and its ability to remarkably change school administration by stating in section 5.2.35 that “Once this is rolled out, this system has the potential to be a game changer. Every student (in every school, college, university or higher education institution), every teacher, Principal, school could have a unique identity – with real-time monitoring of education progress of students, teachers’ contribution to learning, Principals’ performance and the role of school / institution in the education process. This can be an extremely powerful monitoring and management tool, to upgrade the education process phenomenally, in an open and transparent manner.”

The dominant focus of the committee – the restoring of the credibility of the education system and specifically of teachers – has been approached with the familiar administrative tropes of strengthening the bureaucracy, but alleviating some of its deficiencies with the rhetoric of new public management – accountability, transparency and efficiency. The committee has recommended standardised mechanisms for teacher recruitment, selection, deployment and transfers; establishment of special educational tribunals to deal with service related issues; creating a specific cadre of school principals vested with disciplinary powers; the vesting of additional disciplinary powers with SMCs; using of ICTs to monitor teachers as well as to integrate student outcomes with teacher performance; compulsory training provided to teachers and principals leading to licensures; and mandatory school evaluations based on accepted frameworks of standards for which teachers and principals would be held accountable.

These approaches have been used in many countries in the 80s and 90s and seek to bring in market-efficiency arguments into failing public sector services (Aucoin, 1994; Boston, Martin, Pallot, and Walsh, 1996). However, such accountability measures that other systems and countries have attempted have included ideas of autonomy and school based decisions and management. But the overarching fear that the committee senses over the declining quality of education in the country,

coupled with despair over the politicisation of education with its vested interests and rent-seeking behaviour and a lack of confidence in the competency of teachers and principals in the system seems to have forced the committee in detailing out a governance approach that is control based and mechanistic (Rowan, 1990) with little scope for autonomy or for alternate conceptualisations of ‘management’.

While the committee speaks briefly about restoring the credibility of teaching as a profession, the unidimensional application of managerialistic principles without considering the specificities of education as a domain is a deep lacuna in the report. Teaching is a complex activity, requiring teachers to make ‘real-time’ decisions in the classroom that contribute to student learning. This requires teachers to have the autonomy to tailor content, pedagogy, evaluation, and teaching processes to suit the needs of the child and the specific context of the school. Such a profession requires not a mechanistic response of ‘control and evaluate’ but alternate approaches that recognise the centrality of the teacher and support mechanisms needed to make sure that teachers are able to perform their role effectively. This requires turning attention to other forms of management – for example organic structures that are not control but commitment based (Rowan, 1990). The committee makes no mention of ideas of teacher collaboration, peer and self-evaluation, collegiality, teacher learning communities, distributed decision making, teacher leadership or shared vision and the building of school cultures. In their attempt to reduce issues of teacher absenteeism, politicisation, and teacher truancy, the committee has ignored more viable and democratic forms of school management and instead sought ICT enabled surveillance regimes with strengthened supervisory mechanisms within the bureaucracy as a strategy to improve schooling and student learning outcomes. This results in what can be referred to as “controlled de-control” pursuing accountability without sufficient autonomy provided to teachers and principals to improve learning outcomes at the level of the school.

While the committee’s report can be accused of being overly supervisory and control based

in its management recommendations, it is clear that this is being driven by the committee's very explicit recognition of the corruption and political interference that happens at all levels of the system and their desire to reduce this to a minimum. However, the draft report of the MHRD makes no mention of these fears and conclusions of the committee – in fact it does not refer to the committee's report at all. The draft report reiterates the need to improve the quality of school education by pointing out factors that contribute to the “perceived’ failure of schools in the government system: existence of a large proportion of schools that are not compliant to the prescribed norms and standards for a school; student and teacher absenteeism; serious gaps in teacher motivation and training resulting in deficiencies relating to teacher quality and performance; slow progress in regard to use of information and communication technologies in education; sub-optimal personnel management, inadequate attention to monitoring and supervision of performance etc.” (pg. 8). The draft policy seeks to address these through the use of ICT in administrative processes, in reiterating the need for mandatory training for teachers and principals and in once again using the rhetoric of “empowering SMCs to take disciplinary action against absent teachers and principals”. In addition, the draft committee takes on board the committee's suggestion for a dedicated cadre of trained school principals (although the nature of such training is unclear).

The draft policy does not address the fundamental issue of lack of trust that the system faces (which the committee's report had clearly identified). In choosing to ignore the problem of lack of institutional legitimacy that the education system is experiencing, the draft policy does not incorporate or consider learnings from education that provide clearer directions on how changes in school systems and educational reform actually take place. The fundamental ethical role, identity and autonomy of the teacher in the system is left unaddressed. While teacher training is mentioned, the notion of teaching as a profession and the teacher as a professional working in a complex space is left completely unaddressed. The draft report's recommendations suggest a superficial response to

the issue of teacher ‘management’ rather than the core issue of teacher professional development.

Strengthening teacher education, competency and school administration is necessary. However, evidence from around the world suggest that this is best achieved when schools are able to make decisions that are contextually relevant and meaningful to children and teachers feel supported in their efforts to ensure that all children learn. This requires teacher and school autonomy, the development of a shared vision among the stakeholders of the school, the creation of a robust school culture that encourages learning and collaborative practices that involve all stakeholders in decision making in schools. The draft report makes no mention of teacher autonomy and the connections that the committee was endeavouring to make between teachers' performance and student learning, even though problematic, is completely ignored in the draft report. This suggests that the ministry itself recognises that the recommendations being made in the report on strengthening teacher management processes will not necessarily lead to any significant changes in the learning levels of the children or in improving the quality of schools.

The report in its specific management and governance recommendations is delinked from a fundamental understanding of educational goals and aims, of the complexity of teaching and the support required for teachers to perform. It ignores the issues of political power and interference that has plagued the education system and makes no effort in addressing these fundamental issues that will derail any reform initiatives. Given these large gaps, it is difficult to see how additional supervisory and regulatory powers within the hierarchy or the belief in ICT as providing transparent decision making will lead to any improvements in either student learning or in the quality of school education in the country.

References

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