

Educational policy confusion: Who will be the loser?



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Out of 59 universities in Tamil Nadu, 37 universities - private deemed (26), those aided by the union government (2), central universities (2), and educational institutions of special status (7) - have been implementing various schemes, pertaining to the new National Education Policy, brought in by the University Grants Commission. In this situation, the remaining universities' Vice-Chancellors, administrators, lakhs of students, and researchers are in agony, not knowing what to do. Governor R. N. Ravi, who is also the Chancellor of universities, at a recent meeting, instructed the V-Cs to implement the National Education Policy and submit reports on the implementation of the UGC schemes. Higher Education Minister K. Ponmudy, who is also the joint Chancellor of universities, has told the V-Cs that it is their duty to implement the State Education Policy after it is announced by the Tamil Nadu government.

Meanwhile, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) have been collecting data and annual reports on the institutions' implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) – 2020 and awarding rankings. So, the institutions which are not implementing the NEP will likely lag behind in the rankings.

Can Governor enforce it?

The power rests with the universities' syndicate, senate, educational committee, and syllabus committee to enforce any new procedures in education, subjects, research, and degrees. It is the V-Cs who will preside over the meetings held in this regard. But they cannot take decisions without the approval of the members of the bodies. Even the schemes drawn up by the UGC as part of the NEP cannot be implemented without the approval of the members. Most of the members are the secretaries and directors of the various departments, MLAs, and representatives of the teacher organizations, who are appointed by the government. So, even though the Governor, as a representative of the union government, insists on implementing the NEP, he cannot enforce it with the support of his two nominated members.

Notable features

All schemes, introduced by the UGC till now, have been conducive to the welfare of the students, particularly those from poor families.

A student in a college/university pursuing a degree programme can do another course at the same time. Thus, for instance, an Economics student can pursue his second course in Data science either in offline or online. This holds good even for PG courses.

The students can pursue different courses in two colleges or universities and get their certificates and reward points credited

into his academic account. For instance, a student doing chemistry in the Coimbatore Government College can, at the same time, pursue Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in the IIT-Mumbai either online or offline and get the certificates and points linked to his degree in chemistry.

Studying in foreign universities is a dream of most youths. But it is possible only for the affluent. It takes an annual expenditure of Rs.20 lakh and more to pursue an ordinary education in countries such as America, Britain, Australia, Canada, and so on.

To do an engineering course abroad will entail expenses running from Rs. 80 lakhs to Rs.one crore. Even if qualified, several students are hamstrung by economic constraints. In order to help them pursue their dream education abroad, there is a facility that enables them to pursue their final-year education in a foreign university after studying for three years in an Indian varsity so that they get a foreign degree.

Exam in mother language

There is a rule now that says the medium of instruction in all subjects including Engineering, Medicine, Arts, Science, and so on can be one's mother tongue. It is a recognition given to mother languages. The UGC's recent announcement giving permission to college/university students for writing exams in their mother languages is a shot in the arm for the students who have completed their schooling in Tamil and are unable to pursue higher education through English though competent in terms of subject knowledge.

Govt. delay and indifference

Whatever be the new education scheme, it will be applicable and appropriate only to the students who join the first year of a college or university course. The four-year undergraduate courses, integrated research courses, twin-degree programmes, and foreign university-linked degree courses are all set to begin in

the academic year of 2023-24. For all these programmes, 994 Indian universities have already started the admission process. It will be greatly beneficial to students and parents.

But by the time the Tamil Nadu government is done with the process of making its state education policy committee submit its report in September, getting the Assembly's approval for it, and implementing it, a full academic year will be over.

So it is certain that as a result of the government's delay, the students in 2,632 government colleges will lose the opportunity of enjoying the benefits that will accrue for the other state-level and national-level students. If these schemes are dismissed as belonging to the NEP 2020, the most hit will be the students economically backward, living in

interior villages and hills, backward and most backward. Hence, the Tamil Nadu government must take a strong decision and expedite the process; that is the need of the hour.

Translated by V. Mariappan.