Explained | What are the findings of the Parliament panel on the New Education Policy? PREMIUM

How effective has been the implementation of the New Education Policy, especially in Jammu and Kashmir? What did the report say about the multiple entry multiple exit programme?

September 26, 2023 08:30 am | Updated 08:30 am IST

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The story so far: The Parliament Standing Committee on Education, headed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Vivek Thakur, tabled a report during the special session of Parliament on the "Implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 in Higher Education."

What did the report say?

The report looked at the salient features of the NEP's implementation in the higher education sector and the progress made so far. The panel met representatives of various State governments, Union Ministries, higher education institutions and other stakeholders to prepare the report. The report noted that of the 1,043 universities functioning in the country, 70% are under the State Act and that 94% of students are in State or private institutions with just 6% of students in Central higher educational institutions, stressing the importance of States in providing higher education.

What were the issues discussed?

The 31-member panel tried to discuss issues such as the rigid separation of disciplines, limited access to higher education in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, lack of higher education institutes (HEIs) that teach in local languages, the limited number of faculty, lack of institutional autonomy, lesser emphasis on research, ineffective regulatory system and low standards of undergraduate education. The panel said that by 2030, every district in the country should have at least one multidisciplinary HEI and that the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, including vocational education, should be increased from 26.3% in 2018 to 50% by 2035.

What were the recommendations?

The panel asked the Union Government and the State Governments to take actions such as earmarking suitable funds for the education of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), setting clear targets for higher Gross Enrolment Ratio for SEDGs, enhancing gender balance in admissions to HEIs, providing more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs in both public and private HEIs, making admission processes and curriculum more inclusive, increasing employability potential of higher education programmes and for developing more degree courses taught in regional languages and bilingually. The panel also recommended specific infrastructural steps to help physically challenged students and a strict enforcement of all no-discrimination and anti-harassment rules.

The Committee appreciated the manner in which the NEP was implemented in Jammu and Kashmir. It said that the Union Territory was among the first in the country to implement NEP from the academic session 2022 in all its higher educational institutions. The panel said it witnessed a paradigm shift in the methods of teaching, leading to lifelong learning opportunities to students.

What about funding?

The Committee suggested improving the effectiveness and impact of the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) in funding HEIs. It asked the HEFA to diversify its funding sources beyond government allocations and explore partnerships with private sector organisations, philanthropic foundations, and international financial institutions. It recommended reviewing and adjusting the interest rates on loans provided by HEFA "to make them more competitive and affordable" for HEIs.

What about the multiple entry multiple exit programme?

The panel said that Indian institutions were likely to face several issues in implementing the multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) system. The panel said while the MEME looked like a flexible system, which was being operated by Western educational institutions effectively, it might not work well in the country. "If institutions allow MEME, it would be very difficult for the institutions to predict how many students would exit and how many would join midway. Since institutions would not know the in- and out-traffic, it will certainly disturb the pupil-teacher ratio," the report noted.

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