



DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2016 - A CALL TO INVEST IN LIFE SKILL TO PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Background

The National Policy on Education was formulated in 1986 and modified in 1992. It has been the guiding document for over three decades in shaping the education sector in India.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) had undertaken an unprecedented multi-pronged consultation process and constituted a committee in early 2015 for formulating the National Education Policy 2016.

The Draft National Education policy 2016 has been uploaded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and is [open for suggestions till 16 August 2016](#).

Following an in-depth study of the draft policy, Dream a Dream has submitted its recommendations to the Ministry of Human Resource Development to include and invest in life skills to prepare young people for the 21st Century.

A call to invest in Life Skills to prepare young people for the 21st Century

According to Census of India 2011, 41% of the population are under the age of 18 years, making India one of the largest populations of young people in the world. It is estimated that over 6 million¹ (2.97%) children in the age group of 6-13 years are out of school. The Net Enrolment Rate in primary education is 88%, secondary education (age 14-15 years) is 45.6% and 30.4% in higher secondary education (age 16-17 years)¹. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is at 23.6%². The inability to retain learners as they progress is a reflection of the inadequacies in our education system as experienced by young people across India.

Education can help make our children and young people an asset or a liability for the nation. Unfortunately, education today does not understand the challenges of children from vulnerable backgrounds and does not fulfil the promise of successfully preparing them for the 21st century.

After innumerable consultations (numbering of over 2.75 lakhs³) followed by numerous reviews, the [draft National Education Policy](#) 2016 has been uploaded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development for suggestions.

Following an in-depth study of the policy, Dream a Dream has submitted its recommendations to the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Developing the National Education Policy for a country like India with all its diversity and challenges is a complex task. It is remarkable to observe that the policy has made attempts to comprehensively capture the issues and presents pointed policy initiatives to address the gaps.

¹ [Education For All - Towards Quality with Equity - India](#) - National University of Educational Planning and Administration, Ministry of Human Resource Development, August 2014

² Ministry of Human Resource Development, <http://mhrd.gov.in/nep-new>

³ Ministry of Human Resource Development, <http://mhrd.gov.in/nep-new>



The key challenges reported in the policy is a bold acknowledgement of the systemic failures that continue to plague the Education Sector across multiple fronts. These include quality, curriculum and assessment, equity, teacher development and management, governance and budgetary constraints. This collective failure over the years, has denied in providing a secure future especially for young people from impoverished communities in urban and rural India. The draft policy has rightly recognised the need to pursue both the unfinished global goal of Education for All made in 2000 and the targets associated with the global Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that seeks to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’.

The Vision, Mission and Objectives of the Draft National Education Policy highlight the need to replace rote learning with creativity/ innovation and equipping young people with abilities to respond to the requirements of the fast-changing world. However the specific policy initiatives including systems to assess scholastic and co-scholastic learning outcomes limit this understanding to gaining technical and vocational skills. This approach is primed for failure because it does not acknowledge the criticality of Life Skills within education in laying the foundation for life-long learning.

The concern continues to be that we design solutions based on symptoms without investigating the core challenges. Lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates is a symptom to a deeper challenge of children not achieving their development milestones. When children miss out on their development milestones due to adversity, it makes it difficult for them to develop the social and emotional skills needed to survive and succeed in a learning environment. Life Skills can help children overcome adversity and catch-up to their development milestones.

We recommend that, that Life Skills in the National Education Policy 2016 should be understood and applied in its wider context that is in line with the definition of World Health Organisation as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

Research unequivocally shows that students who develop social-emotional skills and academic mindsets are better equipped to succeed in school and are able to transfer theoretical concepts to real-life situations early on⁴. Social and emotional competencies do not just raise academic achievement and educational attainment, but have also demonstrated strong correlations with personal satisfaction and growth, citizenship, and reduced risky behaviour like violence and drug use⁵.

⁴ Carneiro, Crawford and Goodman, The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes (2007)

⁵ Currie, Early Childhood Intervention Programmes: What Do We Know? (2001); Borghans et al. 2008; Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne 2001a; Duckworth and Seligman 2005; 2006



This is also reflective of the sixteen years of field experience of Dream a Dream focused on building life skills in children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Our impact evaluation studies have demonstrated that Life Skills not only stems damage from adversity but also enables young people to make healthy life choices in a fast-changing world. Our experiences reaffirm scientific studies that cognitive skills and life skills are complementary in affecting socio-economic outcomes, and that building character skills can be life-changing for children from such backgrounds⁶.

Key recommendations on how Life Skills can be integrated in the policy initiatives of the Draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2016 are:

1. **Learning outcomes:** The central and state governments should consider expanding the definition of learning outcomes beyond basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to include Life Skills in order to improve the overall learning outcomes of school children which would result in enhancing the quality of education.
2. **Teacher Development:** Teachers are the closest influencers in a child's life after parents. They are uniquely positioned to unlock the creative potential of the child. True transformation in a young person's life happens with the presence of a caring, compassionate adult. In line with this belief, Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Development Programmes should focus on helping the teacher understand the child, develop empathetic approaches to learning, build facilitation skills and provide tools for teachers to integrate Life Skills within the learning sessions.
3. **Curriculum Renewal:**
 - a. Renew curricula that integrates 'Life Skills Approach' to learning in a graded manner at all levels. A Life Skills Approach enables a teacher/school to integrate experiential learning, facilitation and empathy in the delivery framework stemming from understanding child development, psychology and behaviour. An approach where each child is treated uniquely and their unique journeys are nurtured. This action, to develop social-emotional competencies, is geared to enable learners overcome adversity and flourish in a fast-changing world.
 - b. Introduce standardised Life Skills Assessment Scale, such as the peer reviewed published Life Skills Assessment Scale⁷ of Dream a Dream to measure life-skills development in disadvantaged children.
4. **Skills in Education and Employability:** In addition to technical skills, skill development programmes in school and higher education system should give equal priority to building Life Skills not only for gainful employment but also to develop entrepreneurial skills

⁶ Flavio Cunha, James Heckman, Susanne Schennach, Estimating the Technology of Cognitive and Non-cognitive Skill Formation (2010); Pramila Krishnan and Sofya Krutikova, Non-cognitive Skill Formation in Poor Neighbourhoods of Urban India (2009)

⁷ Kennedy, F., Pearson, D., Brett-Taylor, L., Talreja, V. (2014) The Life Skills Assessment Scale: Measuring Life Skills of Children in the Developing World. *Social Behaviour and Personality* 42(2) 197-210



5. **Research, Innovation and New Knowledge:** Build strong evidence through research and impact evaluation studies within an Indian context. Promote generation of new knowledge in scholastic and co-scholastic areas and their introduction into the curricula at all levels of education.

For too long, children and young people have been denied the future they deserve. We sincerely hope that our recommendations will be considered and included in the final draft policy. More importantly, we hope and pray that this policy when adopted, is implemented with all sincerity in letter and spirit.

It will be to our own detriment if we continue to miss out on significant opportunities to enable young people to unlock their potential, break out of the cycle of poverty and be prepared for a world that is changing at an exponential rate. Our demographic dividend could soon become a liability. It is a crisis of education and we need to act now.

About Dream a Dream:

Dream a Dream empowers young people from vulnerable backgrounds to overcome adversity and flourish in a fast changing world, using a creative life skills approach. Over 16 years, Dream a Dream has invested in developing Life Skills amongst over 200,000 young people from vulnerable backgrounds through direct programmes and the development of teachers and educators.

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