

Role of (Public) opinion in educational policymaking in India

Shivani Bakshi

Research Scholar (PhD), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Public opinion plays a significant role in a democracy. Crucial in decoding the process of public policy, from its planning to implementation, it demystifies the working politics behind it. As a result, it has become a need of the hour to check the development of a singular perspective of society, marked by the boundaries of power hierarchies and structures, based on caste, class, gender, religion, and region. There is a need to analyze how does the process of public policymaking accommodate public opinion? Should it be evolved democratically, or should it be niched by a selective group of experts across different fields? The paper contributes to the literature of public opinion in policymaking, particularly in India's educational scenario and is a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of public opinion in the West and the transition of policymaking in India from the hands of experts (National Policy on Education 1986, into the hands of its public New Education Policy (Draft) 2019).

Keywords: public opinion, public policy, new education policy

Introduction

The public opinion serves as a platform for an active civic engagement to shape democracy. It also gets duly reflected in policymaking dynamics, especially when it comes to educational policy formation because education is politically determined (Nordensvard, 2014) ^[24]. A general understanding of public opinion conveys a robust, structured preference(s) of the people about the government and politics, but it has much to offer in actuality. The debate on public opinion is historical and does not explicitly contain in the contemporary world. One cannot deny that public opinion got its recognition and identified as a potent tool in shaping and transforming the society by the German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, in his pioneering work *Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* (Habermas J., 1991). Till today, the question of its significance continues to open the floor for debates. In the contemporary scenario, the valuation of public opinion is thus, grave and needs attention. Habermas had indeed tried to capture the essence of the modern public sphere by promoting the very concept of public opinion, but Taylor (1992) ^[3] warned the academia of the risk involved in terms of taking it as literally. In one of the lectures delivered at the Stanford University titled *Modernity and the Rise of Public Sphere*, he argued that public opinion is a critical entity in the society and should not err as an 'opinion of the humankind.' He rested this nuanced differentiation on three bases, namely, reflection, discussion, and critique, and productivity. According to him, 'opinion of the humankind' was not appropriately reflected and remained '*unmediated by discussion and critique.*' It was '*passively inculcated in each successive generation as well.* However, 'public opinion, on the other hand, was a product of reflection, emerged from the discussion, and substantially generated consensus (Taylor, 1992) ^[3]. Therefore, it becomes essential to look into public opinion as a critical engagement of the

citizens to strengthen the process of democracy and help it realize the ideal.

The research on public opinion asserts the importance of representing the views and perspective of a public. Therefore, it considers its ontological status as it takes into account the representations and voices which are not only contestable but garbed as the opinion (Perrin & McFarland, 2011) ^[26]. It studies the representations of public views. Unfortunately, the research on public opinion has fixated itself on the aspect of the 'opinion' but has barely tried to understand the underlying process of its formation. Thus, there needs to be a constant engagement between the 'public opinion as an underlying process' and 'public opinion as a result' for it is continuously in a state of flux. It follows a structural chain of situational development and response of its citizens who regularly help it evolve democratically. It is certainly not formed with myriad and loose connections and is formed as a part of a single discussion, ushering a unanimous and a standard resolution.

As much as the above-cited conditions guarantee the formation of public opinion, it can be quite intriguing to juxtapose public opinion and education together, when it is evident that both enlighten and build on each other. Education is a vital superstructure of the society that protects the existing socio-political order from critique. It also attempts to undermine any other competing discourse or counter-hegemonies (Nordensvard, 2014) ^[24]. It can, thus, help a nation to rewrite its history. Significant in estimating the expanse of its reach, it potentially contributes to the formation and evolution of public opinion by enabling people to make more informed choices. Hence, to help a democracy reach its ideal state of a definitive cultural relationship, the nation must strengthen its education system. Reinforcing the education system for a rigorous public opinion will realize the true nature of democracy (Marshall, 1950) ^[17].

The paper deliberates upon the idea of public opinion and tries to capture its essence in public policymaking. The paper's idea is as follows: the paper's opening introduces the role of public opinion in policymaking. The following section renders a philosophical understanding of the public opinion as it tries to capture the evolution of the concept shaped by a few pioneering philosophers. The next section focuses on policymaking in the Indian context. It extends to a sub-section on the Lippmann-Dewey debate, referring to the stance offered by their fundamental differences over the role of the expert vis-à-vis the public in a democracy. Where Lippman articulated human incapability in acquiring the wholesome knowledge required for Governance, Dewey opined contrary to this and highlighted the importance of human knowledge. According to him, it was a mandatory feature for the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge processes to generate competence in a democracy. The perspectives provide a deeper understanding of policymaking nuances. The next section studies the most recent New Education Policy (Draft) and the procedure of its formation when the government had opened the gates for the people's voices. The section tries to capture a few concerns associated with it. If it would be fit to classify as an example of public opinion, it needs deliberation at length. The last section concludes by revisiting how public opinion can emerge as a significant aspect of policymaking and strengthen democracy.

Understanding Public Opinion

Public opinion is a widely identified and acknowledged concept in the world today. With its historical trajectory, dating back to the *Enlightenment*, the public opinion research has failed to contain it to a single understanding. If attempted, at the basic, it can be understood as the representation of the collective preferences of people on matters related to the government and politics (Paletz, Owen, & Cook, 2012) ^[25]. Though the understanding offers a myopic view, the concept of public opinion has much to offer. Tracing the origins as early as ancient Greek and Latin civilization, the emergence of the public opinion can be rooted in Plato's *Doxa*. '*Doxa*,' referred to as a general opinion, was incapable in itself to achieve '*episteme*' (knowledge) (Plato, 1943) ^[19]. He distinguished '*doxa*' from '*episteme*' (knowledge) on the grounds of the quality of ascertaining a judgment. If a citizen continued to focus on the physical and the social world, he could achieve a high rational faculty, along with a *doxa*-type competence to reason. While finding its reference for the first time in Book V, the argument continues until Book VII, without condensing the meaning at one point. There is ambiguity in the meaning of opinion as it communicates a fundamental error regarding the nature of reality. According to the classical tradition, opinions considered as the source and the origin of Truth and science. They ushered dialectical reasoning and facilitated access to the Truth (Vaughan, 2008) ^[32]. In 1588, Michel de Montaigne introduced the French idea of *opinion publique*, in the second edition of *Essais* (Montaigne, 2008) ^[21]. In 1672, Sir William Temple wrote his essay upon the *Origin and Nature of Government*, wherein, the focus maintained on the justification of the popular will and the demonstration of its right to rule the policies of the state and the procedure of administration, thereby, sketching general opinion of the public. He disagreed with the prevalent opinion and that the

basis of the functionality of a government rested on a social contract. The government was hence, obligated to the 'general public' (Herriott, 1892) ^[12]. The understanding of public opinion reflects in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Book IV, *Of Knowledge and Opinion*, not only theorized knowledge but also discussed the 'opinion.' Although he regarded opinion as an intrinsically directed factor amongst people to value and conform to the social norms, he remained skeptical in questioning the basis of opinion (Locke, 1690) ^[16]. Another liberal justification for the respect of opinion was offered by John Stuart Mill, especially in *On Liberty*. Mill, too, returned to something like the classical notion of dialectics. However, it was only something like classical dialectics because Mill did not claim that opinions conceal the truths sought by philosophers. Instead, each opinion contains a partial truth that is revealed only through contestation [(Mill, 1972) ^[20], 113 as cited in (Vaughan, 2008) ^[32]. However, Thomas Hobbes deferred in his reflections on public opinion. He clarified that opinion is not the same as Truth and sought to control opinion rather than learning from it. According to him, an opinion is acquired rather than being generated. Besides, it did little to reflect anything substantial about the person holding it. Opinions, therefore, became legitimate objects of manipulation, according to him.

Rousseau and Hegel, known as the philosophers of the French Revolution, theorized the democratic revolution. Where Rousseau maintained that public opinion is suggestive and, therefore, does not need a mediator, Hegel implied the understanding of public opinion within the realms of the State (*Stände*). His fundamental argument was that for decision-making, the people needed to be politically informed. Considering state as the concurrence about civil society in political will, mediated by several institutions, public opinion, according to him, emerged from the representation of (*Stände*). (Neidleman, 2018) ^[22] (Znoj, 2017) ^[34] (Neumann, 1979) ^[23]. Besides them, Kant also asserted that having the freedom of discussion as a necessary condition of human development. He viewed public opinion as a measure to enlighten and refine monarchy, for it suffered if it exercised control (Rauscher, 2007) ^[28]. The departure of the contemporary understanding of the concept of public opinion was marked by Jurgen Habermas' *The Public Sphere*, wherein introduced it as a conscious and an active entity in the society (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974) ^[11]. He maintained that to ascertain the formation of a political public sphere; society has to make a dialogue. The citizens are free to express and articulate their opinion. Thus, the public sphere formed a space for institutional engagement with the citizens' practices within the realm of state power. It mediated between the domains of the family and the workplace, where the private interests prevailed. He differentiated the *bourgeois public sphere* from the public sphere of the welfare state. The former belonged to the social space where public opinion formed, as individuals gathered to discuss their everyday public affairs and organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power. It resulted in the direct reference and conceptualization of the public opinion. He analyzed that through constant deliberation on social issues, the public functions changed public opinion regularly. However, this contrasted to the public sphere of welfare state capitalism, wherein public opinion was not

formed but administered by the elites in politics, economics, and media. They significantly controlled the opinion. By drawing this line of difference, he proposed the dichotomy of the ideal and the contemporary public opinion.

The principles of the public sphere involved an open discussion of issues of the general concern. It employed discursive argumentation to ascertain general interests and the public good. Thus, the public sphere presupposed freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to participate in political debate and decision-making freely. After the democratic revolutions, Habermas suggested the bourgeois public sphere institutionalized in constitutional orders, which guaranteed a wide range of political rights. It established a judicial system that was to mediate between claims between various individuals or groups, or between individuals and groups and the state. This juncture, however, overruled an essential inquiry- to ascertain public opinion as an active agency.

The philosophers mentioned above did indeed conceptualize the idea of public opinion as per their ontological stances. It becomes pertinent to rethink the need to look into Western models of public opinion, especially when India is in a stage of transition. The western ideals befitting the Indian scenario are worth questioning, especially when civilizations of the West and India have evolved at varied tangents, respectively. At such a juncture, it is crucial to evaluate the need to have public opinion in the first place. Secondly, there is a need to probe further on the status of public opinion in India. Thirdly, if the public opinion is a response to the state authority, it should be understood that it emerges as an antithesis to the state (thesis), to promote synthesis (Maybee, 2016) ^[19]. A decentralized power mechanism within the state does not get expelled into the public but circulates in the same superstructure. Thus, questioning the very premise of the power/state authority and the entity of public opinion. For public opinion to sustain and thrive in a democracy, it is essential to consider the state authority as an active agency in a democracy. The argument elucidates in the next section to throw light on some critical areas identified during policymaking that invariably impact its articulation and, to a great extent, its implementation.

Decoding Policymaking in the Indian Context

Policy directly or indirectly finds its reference in the debates of examining a social system. It is considered as a crucial thread to explore the dynamic functioning of the ideological structuring in a society. It consciously escapes the nuances of being defined. As mentioned before, it lays the blueprint of the idea it proposes to implement. However, this explanation offers a myopic view in terms of its understanding. Further exploration of the term leads us to reflect on the subject under the postmodernist lens. It is a process of constant change, thus making policymaking an altogether a dynamic process. A crucial aspect to understand policymaking is to identify its *domain*. Domains particularly help in sketching out the policy structure. A policy is a set of rules and regulations carved within a domain, which, in turn, adhered to society's socio-political issues. The domain maintains its locus around substantive, organizational and cultural basis and guides the stakeholders to brace for the intended public opinion and criticism. (Burstein, 1991) ^[5] (Wiess, 2014) ^[33]

A policy is active as it can initiate change or redefine the functioning of a system as well. It is generative in a sense, and it produces a plurality of meanings. This aspect of a policy gets developed when it is left open for interpretations. An author loses the text's autonomy the moment it the moment a reader reads it (Barthes, 1977) ^[3]. The same could be perceived for the policy as well. The policymakers make a conscious effort to deliver the objectivity behind policy and the intent, yet cease to control the meaning generation. (Ball, 1993) ^[1]. It is an exceptionally challenging and complicated process. Policymaking gets problematized when it situates within the Indian context. The intent behind policymaking bases upon generating consensus amongst its citizens. One of the reasons being that India has a federal character. The concern is resting within democratic politics, wherein the policy formulation takes place through persistent brainstorming on the challenges and issues of the society overall (Knill & Tosun, 2008) ^[14]. The process involved in policy formation is not easy. To every policy formulation, there are two necessary trajectories. The first one refers to setting the policy's pace for the stated goal and its subsequent attainment. It functions on the principle of functionality. The second one is usually pathological, wherein a particular policy has to escape itself from impediments and roadblocks. Thus, reaching out to the goal attainment subsequently. Irrespective of the trajectory chosen, the intention of the policymaking in India aims for the larger good of the diversity. The problem intensifies at the juncture when the proposed policy, after much brainstorming, runs short to justify its stand against a multicultural nation.

If the historical viewpoint is undertaken, with the history of colonization, policymaking in India overshadows the mandates issued under the British rule. The regulations then governed the interests majorly of the Raj. Post the independence, the first input towards the nation-building that emerged targeted the youth and so emerged University Education Commission (1948-49). It also came to be known as the Radhakrishnan Commission, and it provided the independent nation with its first input on Higher education in 1951. With the university system coming up first, a framework proposed to make it functional during the times of transformation during independence (Chikarmane, 2018) ^[6]. However, as the years passed, the policies that emerged gradually focussed upon the different aspects and areas of the Indian education system, namely National Policy on Education (1968), National Policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1992) and the most recent being National Education Policy 2019. Although India's national character did not much seem to reflect much in its administrative integrity, it was in 1976; education, in particular, was duly brought under the Concurrent List so that both the Centre as well as the State governments had their say.

At present, the education system flows in a decentralized format from Centre to the state governments to further segregated at the levels of blocks and villages. If the Centre is responsible as the implementing agency, with state governments having definite participation, policymaking invites discourse for its further development. The point to be emphasized is that policymakers must take an integrated view of their task. To date, a policy's implementation continues to depress the spirit of policymakers and stakeholders alike. Therefore, policymaking should cultivate

democracy and bring forth a more coherent picture of public participation. The argument in the following subsection locates the role of public opinion in policymaking.

(Public) Opinion and policymaking: Revisiting Lippmann-Dewey debate

This section continues to dwell upon the aspect of generating public opinion in society. Also, once generated, how does it percolate to the overall societal structure? As discussed previously, power circulates within a society. It multiplies, becomes interactive, and involved with the due passage of time. A policy is a bi-product of power dynamics. It does penetrate deep into the power relations rather than altering them. Therefore, identifying the root or the basis of power generation within the policymaking process is an arduous task. The plain language and conventional articulation of policy usually portray the complexity of the relationship between the text, policy intention, interpretation, and reactions. (Ball, 1993) ^[1]. However, where does the policymaking process take place is problematic. The percolation of power from the state to the general public is worth questioning, as it is bound to undergo filtration channels. It throws light on the role of the state authority in terms of its execution and implementation and its subsequent reflection in a policy. Its implementation should be judicious and justifiable to ascertain the optimum welfare of society.

Interestingly, this argument was stretched to an extent by Walter Lippmann and John Dewey in 1922 ^[1] (Feinstein, 2015) ^[7]. While Lippmann consigned for an expert committee to frame crucial policy decisions, which intended to benefit the society overall, Dewey, on the other hand, asseverated how public opinion in general can, to a great extent, contribute efficiently to the policymaking without much effect to the bureaucracy. While he emphasized the citizens' active and participatory role, he chose to confront Lippmann's argument. The dichotomy further got stretched, from identifying knowledge generation to conceptualizing ignorance within public opinion. Lippmann felt that the general public is not fit to evaluate a policy; according to Dewey, critically, ignorance was cited as a by-product of specialization and training. So trained individuals in the society should not solely take up the full-fledged responsibility of carrying out the policy recommendations. The crux of the debate juiced out to be whether the floors of policymaking should open to citizens rather than experts or not?

Policymaking certainly requires specialized knowledge and training, yet it should not compromise public opinion. Dewey articulated how the problem was genuinely not concerned with naiveté or expertise, but precisely having to do more with the problem of knowledge generation. For this purpose, he advocated the role of media and its impact on public opinion and democracy. Dewey's reflection on media and communication is evident as there is a growing use of media handles like *Twitter* and *Facebook* besides television

and radio. The portal of having an open dialogue has expanded. Today, barely an issue escapes the eyes of the public because of the growing interconnectedness. However, it does contribute significantly to the policymaking directly as well as indirectly. The expert committees do identify the pros and cons of the decisions, as this public opinion reflects on the reality principle and experiential basis. Neglecting them can far lead to further complications in the execution of the said policy and a state of chaos and anarchy within the society.

Both Lippmann and Dewey maintained solidarity on the idea of 'public' and deliberated their take on its role in policymaking. While Habermas chose to define 'public' by calling people who are not 'scientists,' Lippmann and Dewey added a sociological dimension by adhering to consider 'public' as people sharing a standard set of goals and values. According to them, the public became a living entity, who contributed towards policy formation effectively through participating in debates and voicing their choices and opinions in an uninterrupted manner (Feinstein, 2015) ^[7]. The stances that were proposed offered ample intellectual deliberation but seemed skeptical to venture into the torrid realities of everyday life.

Another significant aspect of the formation of public opinion is that of media. At present, we do face at the hands of a fractured media of communication wherein the aggrandizement of a particular ideology, thought formation, and societal functioning changes the direction of the thought process (Mason, 2017). The media, both at the national and at the international level, has created a perception of how the society should view the public opinion. As a result, isolation cannot deal with subconscious awareness. The discourse that is emerging today has a lot to do with this wave of ideology, which stands contaminated by a presupposed opinionated verdict, the result of which often goes unnoticed in policymaking. It implies that if policymaking restricts the Lippmann's stance of solely having the experts' view, it is bound to impede the pathways to democracy. It would leave not only ample space for questioning but also challenge public opinion in question.

Road to National Education Policy (NEP) and public opinion

The socio-political viewpoint of education focuses on the development of civic education to foster democracy. Therefore, education is a tool to reconfigure the ideology and underwrite a nation (Nordensvard, 2014) ^[24]. Even when there is a standard policy, its implementation generates multiple meanings and realities within one social context. Therefore, what is an idea, with much public discourse, alters itself to suit the functional spaces in the society in which these policies operate. Public policymaking, therefore, operates on a continuum that stretches itself between abstraction and its potential reality. Whether it is the Right of the Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) or the first draft of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2019, the process of charting out a policy has been complicated in India, as it forms the base of the socio-cultural gamut of issues in a multicultural nation. As elucidated in the previous sections, policymaking follows a linear progression in terms of its formation and development. It involves problem identification, selecting the diagnostic approach for policy setting, evolving an action plan, testing it, and finally revisiting it for the final

¹ In 1922, Walter Lippmann had come up with a book called *Public Opinion*, in which he had opined that policy decisions should not be opened to the general public comprising of non-experts. Further, in 1927, he came out with another work, *The Phantom Public*, with a harsher verdict on public opinion and that it should strictly encompass trained and seasoned policy formulators. Dewey penned down *The Public and its Problems*, in the same year, as a befitting response to Lippmann. In his review, he strongly vouched for the relevance of democratic ethics, informing public opinion that mirrors the power dynamics of the society overall and how the functioning otherwise impacted policymaking.

framework. It also dwells upon the linear models of policy formation that primarily involve policy intent, policy premise, policy context, policy mechanism, and finally, policy outcome. (Sutton, 1999) ^[29] (Thomas & Grindle, 1990) ^[31]. Recent interventions in policymaking have led to the incorporation of the viewpoint of the stakeholders as well, namely the students, teachers, principals and heads, and parents or the community. The most recent example of this statement is the Draft of New Education Policy (2019). With policymaking aiming at a general public interest, the control and authority streamline accordingly to bring order and public interest. The process gets problematized when the diverse groups supersede or confront the concept of 'national identity' or 'public interest' (Goel, 2014) ^[8]. It gets close to the idea of *Governance*, which is a way of establishing power dynamics and exercising control and authority in the allocation of resources [(World Bank, 1994), as cited in (Kumar & Narain, 2014)] ^[15]. The idea of Governance remains singular to a great extent. It takes that the rules and the regulations flow from tip to toe in an invariable way. As a result, it expects that the bureaucracy that plays a significant role in decision-making is supposedly unbiased, objective furthermore accommodating. However, the implementation impedes the plan of action, as the policy being the ideal falls short to follow the broken trajectory of the real world and practical life situations. (Thomas & Grindle, 1990) ^[31] in their study on assessing the policy reforms in developing countries, including India, the variability of the implementation dynamics affected the range of outcomes, including revisiting and reframing the policy decisions. (Thomas & Grindle, 1990) ^[31]. The process of policymaking is involving as well as demanding. It expects a certain degree of solidarity, perseverance, and conviction from its makers to restore the noble principals of justice and equality in society. Despite criticizing a situation at hand, expectations from policymakers are high to give due credit if the varsity of complications it has to offer. Therefore, it is an extremely liable job that requires a suitable combination of wizards and experts who understand the ramification of their decision-making as a part of the process involved during the policymaking. Even when the public good's objective remains constant across the policy process, the trajectory taken varies significantly. Thus, policymaking in education requires a different entry point. One of the primary reasons for it to be so is that education remains a shared zone across the disciplines. It also acts as a focal point of disciplines such as philosophy, science, humanities, politics, sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, and event management to some extent. With these disciplines majorly shaping it, it becomes a site of politics and duly gets reflected in the public policy and its implementation. Despite having clarity of the line of action, what significantly remains as a challenge is to articulate this soul and spirit into a workable blueprint and usher doable realization of its objectives. As India gears up to redefine its stance on National Education Policy (NEP), we as a nation stand at crossroads to evaluate a contingent and a comprehensive policy that adds depth to the existing National Education Policy (1986) and provides strength to the values embedded within the Indian Constitution. The NEP's outline formulated by generating a robust public discourse that revisited the premise of having the existing Education Policy at first. It becomes essential to study and evaluate the importance of

public opinion in terms of the NEP in this context. The Committee for NEP Draft, constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in June 2017, had submitted its report on May 31, 2019, under the chairmanship of *Dr. K Kasturirangan*. The report proposed an education policy that sought to address the challenges of access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability faced by India's current education system. While reaching the final stages, the floors were opened for public recommendations, wherein a separate portal was established for the general public to post their comments, suggestions, and recommendations regarding the current issues and the reforms they intended to see. The website of MHRD displayed an array of documents regarding consultation summaries, framework, and a systematically decentralized mode of addressing consultation meets at the grassroots, i.e., at the state, district, and urban local body level, block-level, and village level (GOI, 2019).

The entire process was made transparent on the site, and the data was handled by the Survey Division at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to classify the comments and recommendations for the reconsideration of the draft. The idea dribbled through the layers of bureaucratic gradations and measures of segregating these opinions as generic, administrative, school-related, or related to higher education or professionalization the teachers. It involuntarily draws the attention towards the procedure involved regarding classifying approximately 2.75 Lakh suggestions under different categories. Despite the portal flooded with uncountable recommendations and comments, the final draft being the embodiment of all the opinions, continues to attract intriguing questions and doubts. Media plays a significant role in garnering and establishing the public sphere. Even when the MHRD portal served as the potent tool of bringing diverse opinions and voices under one umbrella, the extent to which the actual content on the portal got percolated in the policy mandate is something one needs to analyze after studying the policy carefully and eventually viewing its implementation in years to come.

On School Education

The NEP draft proposed to institutionalize Early Childcare Education, which articulates loosely in the National Policy on Education (1986) and its subsequent Plan of Action (1992). Similarly, it also promises to professionalize and strengthen the Higher Education sector. However, it does not guide effective implementation. Besides the issue of quality, which continues to haunt the Indian education system, the draft is yet to address the issue directly. With reformatting the secondary and senior secondary under *junior colleges*, a more structured curriculum proposes to liberate the students from selecting the courses across disciplines such as the Humanities, Sciences, and Commerce. The draft asserts on the development of a scientific temper, ethical reasoning, and digital literacy amongst the students. However, there needs to be more clarity on realizing these ideals through a practical blueprint, especially when subjects like Yoga and Music avail as curricular options along with mainstream subjects. Although, this flexibility brings freshness to the existing model of the school curriculum, to what extent will the Higher Education be transformed and prepared to seek this fresh talent from schools, is debatable.

On Higher Education

The NEP (Draft) brought the much-required attention towards the Higher Education system. The implementation intimidates the stakeholders as the scenario is changing fast. Technological advancement has caused a drastic shift in teachers' roles who have now become facilitators of knowledge. (Bhushan, 2019) ^[4]. Considered crucial in developing research, aptitude, professionalism, and socially and ethically aware citizens, higher education to date lacks due attention. Despite the draft bringing an impetus to refine and strengthen the research quality in the area, it has garnered maximum criticism. For instance, it views the representation of the Drafting committee's members as biased as there is a lack of a fair representation of the teachers' or students' union in it (GOI, 2019), Appendix VII. Besides this, the risky four-year undergraduate model is revisited, which was introduced in 2013 and subsequently withdrawn. It has also brought to question the existing and conventional three-year model of graduation. Albeit, the program assures flexible 'exit points'; there is ambiguity in terms of assessing its market value and if the students are ready to make the switch?

Another aspect of the draft that has drawn undue attention is regarding the regulation of higher education. With the remodeling and reconfiguration of the higher education regulatory authorities, such as the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA), HEIs might streamline ushering more accountability and transparency. Despite the focus on streamlining the university systems and the accreditation process, there lies uncertainty of its implementation and runs the risk of replicating the ideology and process of the erstwhile National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC). Interestingly, the draft also recommends a transformation of the regulatory bodies for professional disciplines, such as the Bar Council of India, Medical Council of India, All India Council of Technical Education, National Council of Teacher Education into standard-setting bodies (SSBs), which are required to specify a curriculum framework. However, by bereaving them of their regulatory role and giving autonomy to the institution, it would encourage mushrooming of atypical teaching programs, without much focus on the quality.

Policymaking carries a purpose to achieve set aims and come out with potential solutions to the prevalent problems. It aims to address the issues that bother the society at large. Therefore, the policy is taken as a mandate to perform or ignore a particular set of regulations and attain a more massive benefit of society. Therefore, it should be 'generated' out of public discourse and conceived as the main output of political systems (Knill & Tosun, 2008) ^[14]. With the Draft NEP (2019) raising the stakes for school and higher education, the situation seems pensive. As the process opens to its people, the question that remains unaddressed is whether the idea behind having a public opinion in the NEP (2019), been realized to its full potential?

Conclusion

Public opinion has gained impetus to question its relevance in policymaking, right from the planning to its implementation. It has, not only acts as a mirror to the entire society but also enlightens the authorities regarding the embedded identity crisis that different sections of the society undergo, at a given place and a point of time. With public opinion serving as a base for most decision-making

for the Draft NEP (2019), the policymakers and the government constantly battle the associated risk factors. However, as the system aces to realize the proposed idea, the step taken to bring the authority and the public together is worth appreciating. Communication has become more complex and diversified by providing the public with open fora for discourse that ultimately addresses contemporary problems. The gap has widened between what is needed and what gets provided to the students in the system of education. There is a dire need for a discourse that helps the government review its policies from time to time and not take decades to revisit the existing policies.

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