

Reorienting our focus on literacy

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Since 1967, International Literacy Day is being celebrated every year on the 8th of September. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has marked this day to remind the international community about the significance of literacy for individuals, communities, and society at large. Specifically, this day endeavors to sensitize leaders worldwide about the need for intensified efforts towards building more literate societies. As per UNESCO's official website, the theme for International Literacy Day 2021 is "Literacy for a human-centered recovery: Narrowing the digital divide."

The world is currently facing unprecedented challenges due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Notably, the pandemic has had a profound impact on the education sector and disrupted the learning of billions of children, young people, and adults at a global level. Estimates suggest that the coronavirus crisis has magnified the pre-existing inequalities in access to opportunities for attaining education and has disproportionately affected 773 million non-literate individuals. Accordingly, it becomes



Pre-existing inequalities have been magnified by covid

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extremely crucial for governments worldwide to take appropriate measures to facilitate equitable learning opportunities, especially to the socio-economically disadvantaged groups of society. Against the backdrop of the Covid-19 crisis, the New Education Policy (NEP), approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020, is a timely initiative taken by the Government of India to make quality education accessible, equitable, and inclusive. This policy has been carefully designed in line with India's goal as per the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." NEP 2020 can help India navigate the learning disruptions and losses

arising out of the pandemic. Among other things such as flexibility in course choices, assessment reforms, and vocational education in school and higher education system, the policy focuses on blending technology with the teaching and learning process. The following reforms within the NEP 2020 indicate how technology can be leveraged in acing the challenges in the delivery of quality education amid the pandemic:

- The first step towards harnessing the benefits of online education is the minimization of the digital divide in India. Under the Digital India campaign, concerted efforts would be made to ensure the availability of affordable computing devices.
- After ensuring the availability

of internet-connected smartphones and tablets in all schools and/or homes, online apps with quizzes, assessments, and online communities would be developed.

- Smart classrooms that make use of the digital pedagogy and enrich the teaching-learning process with online resources and collaborations would be developed by schools in a phased manner.
- Top institutions accredited for open distance learning would have the option to develop and run high-quality online courses. These courses could subsequently be integrated within the curricula of higher education institutes to enable a blended mode of learning.
- Technology platforms such as SWAYAM/DIKSHA would be utilized for the online training of teachers. These platforms would provide teachers with a rich, structured, user-friendly set of tools to monitor learners' progress.
- Adult learning would be facilitated via the use of technology-based options such as apps, online courses/modules, online books, and ICT-equipped libraries and adult education centers.
- The existing mass media, such as television and radio, would

be used extensively for telecasts and broadcasts. Educational programmes would be made available on these platforms 24/7 in various languages.

- Appropriate bodies would design and implement advanced assessment frameworks consisting of competencies, portfolios, rubrics, standardized assessments, and assessment analytics.
 - Technology-based solutions encompassing the wide-scale dissemination of learning material would be introduced for the orientation of parents or caregivers of differently-abled children so that the learning needs of such children are accorded priority.
- The Covid situation in conjunction with the NEP can help us redefine the format, content, and methods of delivery of education. As we progress towards the effective implementation of the New Education Policy, India celebrates the true spirit of International Literacy Day and exhibits her continued commitment to building a more literate society.

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