NEXT IAS

DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

EDUCATION POLICY TO PRACTICE: UNESCO'S FRAMEWORK MEETS THE ARTHASHASTRA

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Context

- UNESCO's 2026 ***Leading for Impact*** **framework** and renewed discussions of **Kautilya's** ***Arthashastra*** have highlighted a persistent governance problem i.e. ambitious education policies often fail during implementation.

Educational Policy in India

- Educational policy provides a framework for ensuring **equitable access, quality learning, institutional accountability and holistic development**.
  - However, effective education requires more than introducing new policies; it demands their successful implementation at the classroom level.
- India has undertaken several major educational reforms:
  - **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020:** Introduced the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, emphasising foundational learning, multilingualism, experiential education and competency-based assessments.
  - **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE), 2023:** Provides curricular and pedagogical guidance aligned with NEP 2020.
  - **NIPUN Bharat Mission:** Aims to ensure foundational literacy and numeracy among children by the end of Grade 3, with a mission target of 2026–27.
  - **Samagra Shiksha:** Supports school education through infrastructure development, teacher training, inclusion and improved learning outcomes.
- These initiatives require effective coordination among central and state governments, district administrations, school leaders and teachers.

Why Does Educational Policy Implementation Remain Challenging?

- **Administrative Fragmentation:** Multiple authorities, from ministries to district education offices and schools, can create overlapping responsibilities and weak coordination.
- **Regional Disparities:** Socio-economic inequalities, geographical barriers and linguistic diversity make uniform implementation difficult.
- **Inadequate Institutional Capacity:** According to UDISE+ 2025–26, India has approximately 1.01 lakh single-teacher schools, reflecting persistent challenges in teacher deployment.
- **Digital Divide:** Despite progress, only 67.4% of schools had internet connectivity in 2025–26, limiting technology-based reforms.
- **Compliance-oriented Administration:** Excessive reporting and inadequate feedback can shift attention from actual learning outcomes to completing administrative formalities.

UNESCO's Four Drivers and Kautilya's Governance Principles

- **UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)** introduced the ***Leading for Impact*** **framework** in 2026. Its four interconnected drivers offer practical solutions to policy implementation challenges.
- **Contextual Adaptation:** UNESCO argues that educational reforms need to reflect local resources, institutional conditions and community needs.
  - Kautilya similarly emphasised situational understanding and ***Anvikshiki*** **(critical enquiry and logical reasoning)** as foundations of effective decision-making.
  - Schools in tribal, rural and urban areas require locally appropriate teaching methods, language support and resource allocation rather than identical implementation strategies.

- **Ownership and Engagement:** UNESCO highlights stakeholder participation, shared objectives and clear responsibilities.
  - Kautilya emphasised consultation with ***Amatyas*** **(councillors or administrators)**, coordination and accountability in governance.
  - **NIPUN Bharat** requires active participation from teachers, school leaders, parents and communities. **School Management Committees** can strengthen local ownership and accountability.
  - However, Kautilya's monarchical framework needs to be adapted to contemporary democratic principles rather than applied literally.
- **Institutional Capacity:** UNESCO considers institutional competence essential for translating policies into meaningful action.
  - Kautilya emphasised the intellectual ability, integrity, training and administrative efficiency of public officials.
  - Curriculum reforms require properly trained teachers and capable school administrators.
  - Programmes such as **NISHTHA** and strengthened **District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs)** can support continuous professional development.
  - Even well-designed reforms risk becoming procedural exercises without adequate capacity.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL):** UNESCO emphasises timely information, performance assessment and continuous institutional learning.
  - Similarly, Kautilya recognised the importance of reliable information, supervision and corrective action.
  - **UDISE+** provides information on school infrastructure, enrollment and teachers, while **PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024** assessed student competencies in Grades 3, 6 and 9.
  - Such evidence should guide targeted interventions rather than merely fulfil reporting requirements.

Way Forward: Strengthening Educational Governance in India

- India must adopt an implementation-oriented approach by:
  - **Strengthening decentralisation:** Allow states, districts and schools greater flexibility to address local educational needs.
  - **Building institutional capacity:** Invest in teacher training, school leadership, DIETs and middle-level educational administration.
  - **Promoting participatory governance:** Strengthen School Management Committees and community engagement.
  - **Ensuring evidence-based accountability:** Use learning assessments and digital monitoring to identify shortcomings and initiate corrective action.
  - **Encouraging critical enquiry:** Integrate *Anvikshiki*-inspired reasoning, ethical decision-making and interdisciplinary learning into educational practice, as highlighted by the Observer Research Foundation.

Conclusion

- UNESCO's contemporary framework and Kautilya's administrative insights demonstrate that **educational transformation depends on institutional effectiveness, not policy ambition alone**.
- Strengthening local ownership, administrative competence and continuous learning is essential for achieving NEP 2020 objectives and **SDG 4** i.e. inclusive and equitable quality education.

Source: ORF

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Examine the major challenges in implementing educational policies in India and suggest measures to bridge the gap between policy objectives and classroom outcomes.