

THE TEACHERS WE NEED FOR THE EDUCATION WE WANT

"What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches."

—Karl Menninger

In a country like India, with its vast education ecosystem and network, teacher education is like a big ship—it is hard to turn by design alone; persistence matters the most. As I reflect on my journey as minister of state for education, one thing stands clear: the heartbeat of our educational system lies in the dedication, resilience and passion of our teachers. Over the past few months, I've had the privilege to interact with many of these educators across the country, hearing first-hand about their journeys, challenges and their unwavering commitment to shaping the future of our nation.

Whether stationed far from home or facing professional or personal hardships, our teachers continue to give their all, ensuring that no child is left behind. The influence of a teacher on a child's life is deeply felt and profound. Children may not always heed the advice of their parents, but when a teacher speaks, they listen. They remember what their teachers say, sometimes even correcting their parents with the words, "But my teacher said..." Such is the trust and respect that students place in their educators.

India is in a fortunate position with a robust teacher population, setting it apart from many nations currently facing teacher shortages. This ample pool of educators provides a solid foundation for the country's educational system. However, challenges remain as some educators lack the essential qualities a teacher needs in this day and age, and others fall short in terms of the necessary skills to excel. We need to fill these gaps and we need to fill them fast.

In the past, teaching was often about delivering information in a standardised manner, with little room for creativity or individuality. Schools operated like factories, churning out students with the same knowledge and skills. But today, we recognise that education is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about nurturing the child, understanding their unique needs, and helping them develop into well-rounded individuals who can thrive in a complex world. Our curriculum—and consequently the pedagogy—should keep up as the pace of societal change accelerates.

Teachers of the future will need to be versatile, able to integrate art, sports, technology and traditional subjects in ways that

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make learning both joyful and meaningful. Most importantly, they will guide students not just in academics, but in life—helping them to become innovators, responsible citizens and compassionate human beings.

This is where the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 comes into the picture. The NEP redefines the teaching profession, emphasising the need for teachers who are not only knowledgeable and skilled but also motivated, compassionate and adaptable. Imple-



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menting such transformative changes across a diverse and resource-variable country like India is no small feat. However, through the collective efforts of policymakers, educators and communities, we are already seeing examples of success. In classrooms where NEP 2020 is being actively implemented, teachers are using innovative methods to make learning more meaningful and engaging, preparing students for the future.

Picture a teacher who not only masters his or her subject but also serves as a mentor, guide and friend, and sometimes even a superhero in the classroom. That is the vision we're striving for. Our initiatives such as the National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement or NISHTHA and the four-year Inte-

grated Teacher Education Programme are designed so that our teachers are well-equipped to meet the challenges of contemporary education, while also fostering a love of learning they will pass on to their students. With the National Professional Standards for Teachers and the National Mission for Mentoring, we're empowering our educators to become superheroes in their own right.

The concept of a teacher itself is evolving with age. During my visit to the women-only National Skill Training Institute in Noida, I was amazed to see two young girls who had just completed their education and had developed a chatbot with the technical education they had received in artificial intelligence at the institute. These pioneering girls will now go on to teach and educate other young professionals around the country in these new-age skills. This evolution in the conception of a teacher is an exciting one for the future of our nation.

By embracing innovative strategies and adapting to evolving educational landscapes, educators can equip students with the skills necessary for success in an ever-changing world. Policymakers, educational institutions and teachers need to collaborate to ensure a seamless transition towards skill-based learning, empowering the next generation with the competencies needed to thrive both personally and professionally.

As we look to the future, it's important to remember that AI and other technologies will not replace teachers. Rather, teachers who embrace these tools will replace those who don't. The artists of the blackboard will evolve to become artists of the digital smartboard, shaping young minds with the same care and dedication, but with powerful new tools at their disposal.

This Teacher's Day, let us celebrate the incredible work our teachers do every day. The teachers we need for the education we want are already among us—they are dedicated, compassionate, and always striving to do better for their students. It is our responsibility to support them, to listen to them and to ensure that they have the resources and recognition they deserve.

(Views are personal)