Education Governance

Why in News?

India's education system is currently navigating a turbulent phase marked by significant challenges in exam administration, particularly highlighted by recent controversies surrounding the National Testing Agency (NTA).

How education is governed in India?

- **During British India** – The *Government of India Act, 1935* during the British rule created a federal structure for the first time in our polity.
- The legislative subjects were distributed between the federal legislature (present day Union) and provinces (present day States).
- Education which is an important public good was kept under the *provincial list*.
- **After independence** – The earlier practice was continued and education was *part of the 'State list'* under the distribution of powers.

***Article 246** deals with the **7th Schedule** of the Indian Constitution that mentions three lists named as Union List, State List and Concurrent List which specify the divisions of power between Union and States.*

- **Education in concurrent list** – The ***Swaran Singh Committee*** constituted during the national emergency recommended to place 'education' in the concurrent list in order to evolve all-India policies on the subject.
- This was implemented through the ***42nd constitutional amendment (1976)*** by shifting 'education' from the State list to the concurrent list.

The concept of 'Concurrent List' in the Indian Constitution has been borrowed from the Constitution of Australia. While both Central and State Government can legislate on subjects mentioned under Concurrent List, however, in case of any conflict, the law made by the Central Government prevails

- **Arguments in favour of this shift –** Education in the concurrent list promotes efficient administration of education and holding higher standards throughout India.
  - A uniform education policy
  - Improvement in standards
  - Improved synergy between Centre and States.

What are challenges of education in concurrent list?

- **Historical issues** – There was no detailed rationale that was provided during the switch of education into concurrent list.
- The corresponding constitutional amendment was *ratified by various States without adequate debate*.
- **Inconsistent strategy** – The *UGC-NET was changed* from an offline exam to an online format in 2018 was ostensibly aimed at modernising and streamlining the process.
- However, *2024 saw a regressive shift back to pen-and-paper testing*, a move that has raised eyebrows given its potential vulnerability to leaks and malpractices.

> ***The National Testing Agency (NTA)*** *is an autonomous agency under the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education of India. It was established in November 2017 to conduct entrance examination admissions and recruitment.*

- **Inefficiency of NTA** – Similar irregularities have marred other prominent *exams like NEET-UG and JEE*, raising serious questions about the NTA's ability to conduct fair and secure assessments.
- **Corruption** – *Technical glitches, leaks, and allegations of malpractice* have tarnished exams under its purview, eroding trust and questioning the agency's ability to uphold assessment integrity.
- **Systematic flaw in centralised control** – Centralization's primary flaw lies in its *struggle to manage the scale and diversity* of India's educational landscape effectively.
- **Bureaucratic bottlenecks** – The slow bureaucratic machinery often hampers swift corrective actions, as witnessed in the delayed responses to past exam irregularities.
- It undermines the credibility of the entire examination system.

Why do we need decentralisation of education?

- **Arguments in favour of decentralisation** – *One size fits all approach is neither feasible nor desirable* in a diversified India.
- *Higher share of education expenditure is done by state* governments.

> *The report on 'Analysis of Budgeted expenditure on Education' of the Ministry of Education in 2022, shows that out of the total revenue expenditure by education departments in India estimated at ₹6.25 lakh crore (2020-21), 15% is spent by the Centre while 85% is spent by the States.*

- Decentralisation could *spur innovation* in exam administration and evaluation methods *tailored to local educational contexts*.
- This flexibility not only *promotes educational diversity* but also encourages continuous improvement in exam administration practices.
- States are often *better equipped to address local nuances* and challenges, thereby potentially *reducing logistical hurdles* and enhancing responsiveness to regional

needs.

- It is about ensuring *greater transparency, accountability*, and effectiveness in the examination process.
- It would empower states to explore alternative assessment models that align more closely with their educational objectives and student demographics.

International Practices of Education Governance
• **In the U.S.** – State and local governments set the overall educational standards, mandate standardised tests and supervise colleges and universities. • The federal education department's functions primarily include policies for financial aid, focussing on key educational issues and ensuring equal access. • **In Canada** – Education is completely managed by the provinces. • **In Germany** – The constitution vests legislative powers for education with landers (equivalent of States). • **In South Africa** – Education is governed by two national departments for school and higher education. • The provinces of the country have their own education departments for implementing policies of the national departments and dealing with local issues.

What lies ahead?

- It is essential to strike a balance that *preserves national standards* while *harnessing the strengths of regional expertise* and governance.
- This approach could pave the way for a more resilient and inclusive examination system that inspires confidence among students and ensures fair opportunities for all aspiring learners.
- Decentralisation, with increased state-level involvement, offers a promising path forward to address challenges and uphold India's educational assessment integrity.

References

1. The Hindu| Discussion for moving Education back to State List
2. Economic Times| Decentralising Education in India

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