

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (2020): A REVOLUTIONARY STEP FOR SCHOLASTIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN INDIA

Abstract

A robust educational system is the backbone of the economic and social progress of a country. India's National Educational Policy (2020) has been the latest futuristic step to the structural transformation of the educational sector aligned with the Global Agenda SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 4 which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education promoting lifelong learning possibilities for all. The futuristic and holistic approach proposed is expected to provide a comprehensive framework from primary education to higher education augmenting technology-induced vocational skills and welcoming new horizons of internet-based learning. This paper depicts a systematic overview owing to the various contours of NEP - 2020 posturing it as a vehicle of change and bringing India a pace nearer to 'the Atamnirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India). The paper also presents certain apprehensions which may come in the way of India's objective to foster equitable quality education for all. These trepidations have to be sought at the earliest so that Indian education becomes globally competitive.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Indian Higher Education System, Autonomy, Challenges.

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I. INTRODUCTION

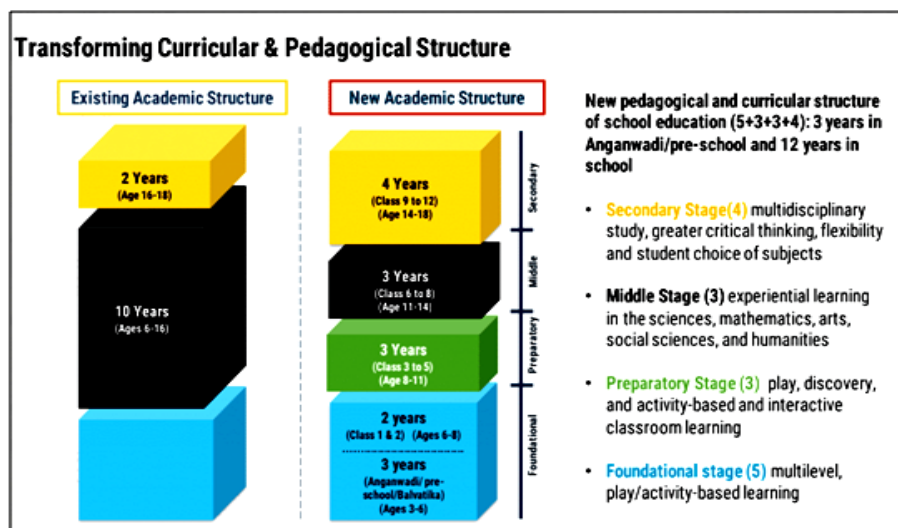
“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

India is known for its Gurukul system and has been known to be a major educational hub since the historic era. The ancient universities at Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vallabhi stand the glory of our ancient schooling. ‘Macaulayism’ or the Macaulay system of English Education in the 80s replaced the gurukul system. The first two policies of post-independent India announced in 1968 and 1986 suffered from several apprehensions like poor quality of education, inequality, lack of accessibility, and so on. This dearth of quality education has resulted in a brain drain and many students flee to foreign countries for better educational opportunities. This has been evident in the survey conducted by Tata Institute of Social Sciences and industry body ASSOCHAM; whereby it was observed that \$6-7 billion which is about Rs 45,000 core is spent by Indian students abroad (Kumar, 2015). This needed a call for change in the academic structure for the socio-economic development of the youth and the country at large. To foster the future generation with quality education, the Union Cabinet approved the National Education Policy (NEP) on July 29, 2020, with a vision to bring about a transformation rooted in Indian ethos to provide a sustainable equitable learning environment and vibrant knowledge society thereby making India a global knowledge Superpower (NEP, 2020). NEP 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and overall, the third educational policy of India, which aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of the country (Mygov, 2020).

The NEP, 2020 envisages aligning the Indian education system with the Global Sustainable development goal Agenda (SDG) 4 which ensures equitable, accessible, and quality education for all. The extant 10+2 structure of schooling is restructured to 5+3+3+4. The structural changes have been incorporated to make the base of early childhood strong.

Figure 1: Structural change in NEP, 2020



(Source: Mavelysdiary, 2020)

- 1. NEP and Sustainable development Goal (SDG 4):** The principal objective of SDG-4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” **India has designed its policy in such a way that it is tied to the global agenda** of “Quality Education.” NEP lays its emphasis on the achievement of universal accessibility and equity which is built based on its 5 pillars: (i) access, (ii) equity, (iii) quality, (iv) affordability, and (v) accountability. NEP provides for the setting up of a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) which aligns with the target of SDG-4 so that equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students can be ensured. This will minimize the gender inequality in the school enrollment ratio. Furthermore, the constitution of the National Education Technology Forum (NETF) aims at instilling vocational and technical skills at an earlier stage of schooling. This will help in accomplishing sub-target 4.3 regarding equal and affordable access to vocational and higher education. Similarly, the ABC (Academic Bank of Credit) has been proposed to provide pupil with digital infrastructure to store their academic credentials thereby ensuring seamless quality education across the globe (in sync with SDG-4.4). To ensure seamless and unbiased education aligned with the 4.5th target of SDG-4, NEP leverages and broadens the horizon of e-learning simultaneous with traditional education to get the benefit of blended learning and mitigate the downsides. For fulfilling the target of numeracy and literacy skills as per SDG 4.6 target, NEP has advocated the constitution of the National Foundation of Literacy and Numeracy (NFLN). For the attainment of multidisciplinary and holistic education, environmental education for sustainable development and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is promoted to further strengthen the SDG 4.7 target.

The policy thus proposes a new set of regulations to make the education pedagogy more experimental, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, analysis-based, flexible, enjoyable, and futuristic so that the educated output can support the country’s economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, cultural preservation, and national integration (**Aithal & Aithal, 2020**). NEP promotes a learner-centered environment as students have the autonomy to select the allied subject as per their interest areas which also ensures lifelong education for pupils (**Banerjee, Das, & Ghosh, 2021**).

- 2. NEP rooted in the past glory:** India has produced many eminent and proficient scholars including Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, Chanakya, Chakrapani Datta, Madhava, Panini, Patanjali, Nagarjuna, Gautama, Pingala, Sankardev, Maitreyi, Gargi and Thiruvalluvar and numerous such great scholars. The rich heritage of ancient Indian education is unparalleled. This rich heritage itself has been one of the guiding lights behind the formulation of the policy whereby NEP intended to restore the lost ancient glory. The NEP aims at achieving universal quality education while remaining in the same Indianness and taking pride in the rich and diverse culture in the pursuit of gaining vibrant knowledge.

It aims at instilling in students various ethical and moral values to develop cognitive minds. The curriculum will be so framed that it develops analytical thinking and feeds inquisitive and innovative minds. It proposes to bring vibrant knowledge to amplify the multidisciplinary environment that once existed in the ancient Indian universities

Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramshila. To successfully attain the aforementioned aims, it is required to bridge the currently existing gap by undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

NEP envisions an India that contributes to the value addition of quality education that is sustainable and ensures uniformity. The objective of the policy is to provide a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary liberal education to everybody based on a proposed system. It is in alignment with the global agenda of SDG 4 of quality education which aims to be accomplished by 2040. The pursuit of knowledge is derived from the ancient philosophy that aims at wisdom (Pragyaa) and truth (Satya). It aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution (NEP, 2020). NEP 2020 has the potential to transform the education sector of India and provide it with the benefits of quality, equity, and efficiency (Kumar & Varghese, 2021).

The most remarkable aspect of NEP is the extent of consultations it took before its final drafting. Numerous people (almost lacs) of gram panchayats, thousands of blocks, and hundreds of districts were consulted. For the understanding of non-English speakers, the final drafts were translated into many vernacular languages. Besides this, the consulting panel also included Educationists, representatives of state governments, and members of parliament (Kumar, 2020). Moreover, NEP 2020 received acceptance from netizens on Twitter as NEP envisioned reducing the educational complexities prevalent (Saini, Singh, & Kaur, 2021).

One of the most suitable ways to promote equity in education is brought in by promoting internet-based learning i.e., e-learning. NEP has further taken all the steps to remove any bias by producing e-content in eight regional languages - Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, and Oriya. Furthermore, to encourage a technology-induced environment in e-learning, an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) was proposed to be constituted (News 18, 2020). The GDP contribution to education was meagre earlier with around 2.7% only (as of 2017-18). This was inadequate considering the large population of youths in India. NEP also envisages increasing GDP contribution (Kazmi & Ali, 2021).

Kumar, Prakash, & Singh (2020) emphasized various facets of NEP. The paper addresses some of the major drawbacks and executional challenges. The GDP allocation gap of India towards education has made India deficient in terms of educational adjustment. The target of 50% enrolment in higher education by the year 2035 according to the author is sufficiently a longer period of time considering the future expansions in the IT sector particularly artificial intelligence. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic amidst the development of e-learning, it was a noticeable fact that most of the contents obtained was in English and lacked regional languages. Another bottleneck highlighted by Mahajan (2021) was that the successful implementation pre-supposes the coordination between the centre and state. However, some of the states have already expressed their disagreement. Kurien & Chandramana (2020) talk about the effective and time-bound implementation of the policy to ensure its success.

Maurya & Ahmed (2020) expressed their doubt about NEP in achieving the objective of maintaining uniformity in education. According to the researchers, India having the largest youth population with diverse cultures, different interests, and varied learning orientations may act as a hurdle in the fulfillment of a unified education system. While **Maharaj, Ahuja, & Malhotra (2021)** explored that the Indian diverse culture itself would help in the successful implementation of the policy. The study traced the parts of the Bhagwat Gita that seeks to give a perspective on pedagogy which is a vital factor for the successful execution of NEP 2020. The study highlighted the importance of pedagogy used by teachers from the perspective of Krishna and his pupil, Arjuna from the Shrimad Bhagwat Gita.

Saroja & Anand (2020) described NEP as a new instructional procedure capable of bringing about huge movements in schools and advanced edification. He pointed out that NEP is rather idealistic in nature. The void between the mission and vision would bring drift between expectations and implementation. He drew attention to the importance of allocating a higher percentage of GDP to educational activities which are important for both the literacy and economy of India.

NEP 2020 initiatives would drive the country towards “The Atmanirbhar Bharat” (the self-reliant India). It aims at utilizing the unique assets and vast resources India has, which have often been erroneously perceived as liabilities in the form of the burgeoning population. Attempts have been made by NEP to yield the benefits obtained from the demographic divide. It aspires to promote digital infrastructure and set up virtual labs to train and promote the use of technology. For this reason, many national e-learning platforms viz. SWAYAM, Disha, and e-pathshala are promoted (**Jha et al., 2020**).

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study provides an overview of the new National Education Policy 2020 and how it aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 targets. It also highlights certain apprehensions considering various constraints associated with the implementation process.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The study makes use of secondary data to arrive at the conclusion that is garnered through books, journals, websites, and other such e-sources. The above-garnered data was then analysed and reviewed to arrive at the inferences and conclusions.

V. CHALLENGES

One of the foremost challenges that India faces is the restricting of the deep-rooted current education system. Educational needs in India are catered to by Private and Govt. institutions. In Govt. institutions also, there are two levels of Govt. that exist – Central Govt. institutes and State Govt. Institutes. The gap between the funding of these two levels is rather large and noticeable. Central govt. institutions are rather highly recognized and renowned by

the public at large but the situation is not so rosy for the State Govt. education institutes. The performance of the private education sector is also not satisfactory. Still a large no. comes under its purview for which poor governance may be the inhibiting factor.

India being a country with diverse and vast cultures and people coming from varied backgrounds; there may be hurdles in achieving the objective of unified education for all. The ever-existing digital divide between the have and have-nots proves the obstacle to the implementation of NEP. Only 4.4 percent of households have computers in rural India, as against 23.4 percent of urban households and nearly 14.9 percent of rural households have internet facilities as against 42.0 percent of urban households. NEP also recommends the use of e-devices for developing e-learning horizons but all the students may not be able to afford them (**Mahajan, 2021**). This may inhibit the objective of “Accessibility (Equal access for all).”

One of the objectives of NEP is doubling the Gross enrolment by 2035 which is fairly a long period of time considering the technology-driven age. Another challenge is to establish proper coordination between state and central Govt. which is a mammoth task. Again, the realization of the objectives requires the active participation of both the stakeholders i.e., teachers and students. The sync between the spirit of NEP and HEIs (Higher Education institutions) is the prerequisite for an active learning environment besides social and moral awareness.

Another criticism pointed out by netizens on social media is about the violation of the set of codes of conduct. Regulations in the Indian constitution are demarcated by three different lists viz. the Union List, the State List, and the Concurrent List. The Centre makes the law on the Union list, State on the state list, and both centre and state on the concurrent list. Education being on the concurrent list is subject to be put on a threshold period and the absence of which resulted in outrage by netizens on Twitter with #RejectNEP2020 trending (**Kamala, 2021**).

NEP welcomes the entry of other educational institutions from abroad to avail better quality of education. The entry of this eminence institution into India would pose a challenge for the current setup of the country. Many existing institutions may collapse unable to bear the global competition.

The lack of awareness among the Secondary and Higher Secondary School Teachers is another glaring challenge to be met with. In the study conducted in Madurai, it was seen that the overall awareness among the teachers was quite low. This was specifically evident in the case of female teachers. Unless and until the awareness among the teachers increase NEP cannot be implemented successfully in its true sense. Govt. must arrange such programs which help in spreading awareness among teachers (**Maruthavanan, 2020**).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NEP 2020 is indeed a futuristic step to reform and make radical changes in secondary and higher secondary education to empower the youth and thereby making an idealistic generation for the nation. To construct Indians for a leap into tomorrow, NEP 2020 is the

right step. The new National Education Policy, 2020 thus aims at making the education system holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, and aligned to the needs of the 21st century and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It aspires to change the outlook and bring about structural transformations in the educational system and make it globally competitive.

The systematic implementation however requires coordination between union and state which has to be ensured. The education should be industry-oriented so that the jobs match the acquired skills of the youth. The top-down approach of implementation would yield better results as the accountability still remains with the top authority. There should not be any discrimination in the research funding process between public and private organizations and their faculty members. The objective of “access” would be accomplished if the digital divide between the rich and poor reduces. For that, the state should make provision of internet facilities that would provide all with equal opportunity for an education. As far as research is concerned to cease brain drain and foreign exchange going abroad, universities should start their own publication units for books & peer-reviewed journals to avoid publications in predatory journals and to retain copyright with authors. The teacher’s involvement in the implementation should be ensured so that they should be more aware. There has to be conducted some sort of workshops for teachers’ training and development and so as to keep them updated. Thus, the success of this holistic and futuristic step to a large extent depends upon how both the state and centre will address the pertinent challenge.

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