

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Implementation and Challenges

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents comprehensive strategies to reform the Indian education system, since the NEP of 1986. The new policies are designed to suffice the country's modern needs and aspirations, especially keeping the technological revolution in mind. The policy seeks to promote holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, equitable and technology-enabled education from early years of childhood, all the way to higher education. It focuses on aspects like foundational literacy and numeracy, competency-based learning, vocational education, digital integration, teacher development, institutional autonomy, all while promoting innovation, research and experimentation. The successful implementation of the NEP certainly depends on solving specific challenges, usually related to financing, infrastructure, teacher preparedness, digital inequality, governance, language diversity and transparency/reliability with stakeholders. In this paper we shall study all major provisions provided by the NEP of 2020. We shall also assess implementation strategies, identify key challenges and strategic approaches to achieve quality, equitable and inclusive education...

Keywords: National education policy, education reform, school, higher education, digital learning, teacher, India...

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental and foundational for national development. It fosters human capital, promotes innovation, strengthens democratic values and supports economic growth. In this period of immense technological progress, globalization and transitioning workforce requirements, educational systems need to evolve so that learners may acquire the knowledge-base, skill-set, creativity and latest ethical values. India has one of the world's largest student populations, hence it is evident that the country would have transitioning needs as development keeps changing the educational landscape. There was always a pressing need to transform the education system to better address contemporary demands and future challenges. The National Education Policy (NEP) was approved by the Indian government on 29th July 2020, marking a significant milestone for a broader transformation process. It basically replaces the older National Policy of 1986, which was later modified in 1992. The new set of rules and regulations bring a learner-centered, multidisciplinary, competency-based and somewhat flexible education system. The NEP aims at boosting inclusivity and accessibility, altogether promoting universal access to quality education while promoting critical thinking, creativity, research, innovation, digital literacy and employability. The major contrast is that older policies focused more on expansion and access. The new vision is to prepare learners for the contemporary real-world, where technology and interdisciplinary approaches have somewhat dominated the educational landscape now. To form an education system that nurtures intellectual curiosity, social responsibility, constitutional values, and global citizenship while preserving India's rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity is the final goal. Additionally, the NEP aligns well with the Sustainable

Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) centering educational reforms. The framework is indeed ambitious, however, implementation remains the determining factor in realizing the objectives of NEP 2020. India's vast geographical diversity, socio-economic disparities, administrative complexity and institutional variations likely present challenges or hindrances that impede the process of translating policy into practice. In this regard, knowing these implementation issues becomes crucial for evaluating the long-term success of the NEP of 2020.

Aims and Methodology

This paper aims to analyze the objectives and vision of the NEP, understand major reforms in school and higher education, understand the complications and challenges that emerge during the implementation process, and to finally skim through certain measures for its successful execution of NEP 2020. We employ a qualitative approach, wherein the key method is to study/examine secondary sources, academic works, research articles and so on.

Literature Review

Educational reforms are always set to improve learning outcomes and existing systems. Systemic transformation is needed, not isolated interventions. UNESCO (2021) stresses on the fact that future education policies/frameworks must prioritize equity, flexibility, lifelong learning, digital inclusion and learner-centered pedagogies. Along similar lines, the OECD (2023) also states that education policies must produce specific outcomes, like enhancing interdisciplinary competencies, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities for modern dynamic societies. The National Education Policy of India, put forward in 2020, draws upon extensive consultations with educators, policymakers, researchers and stakeholders across the country. Reforms are centered on holistic learning, foundational literacy, multidisciplinary education, flexible curricula, technology integration and improved governance (Government of India, 2020). Kasturirangan (2020), who previously chaired the committee responsible for drafting the NEP, said that the eventual goal is to move Indian education away from rote memorization and more towards conceptual understanding and experiential learning. Scholars like Tilak (2021) recognizes the policy's transformative potential, however he cautions that adequate public investment and institutional capacity, both are fundamental when it comes to the successful implementation of the NEP. Others like Jandhyala B. G. Tilak (2022) posits that while NEP 2020 is an ambitious plan, many of its recommendations require substantial financial commitments, coordinated governance and robust monitoring mechanisms. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Reports similarly stress that educational reforms succeed only when policy intentions are accompanied by adequate infrastructure, teacher capacity building, accountability mechanisms and inclusive implementation strategies. Additionally, recent studies have shown how digital education, multilingual instruction, vocational integration and institutional autonomy have become essential factors in educational reform.

Major Reforms and Technological Integration

The NEP 2020 indeed presents a transformative vision, to forever restructure India's education system for the greater good, and satiate the demands/aspirations of the modern learner, while also preserving the country's rich and diverse cultural, as well as intellectual heritage. The NEP introduces comprehensive reforms across school education, higher education, teacher training, research, governance, laying specific guidelines for the use of technology too. The founding principles of this framework/policy includes equity, accessibility, quality, affordability, accountability and lifelong learning. The NEP is designed for an education system that nurtures well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking, creativity, innovation and ethical decision-making. The policy also seeks to prepare learners not only for employment, but also for active citizenship and successful global engagement. As already mentioned, it aligns well with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, wherein inclusivity and equitable quality is focused upon, and not merely over academic achievement alone. The policy further advocates holistic development by integrating cognitive, emotional, social, physical and moral dimensions of learning. During a time of heightened inflation and rising poverty levels, the NEP is set to reduce disparities in educational access and outcomes, by essentially providing inclusive educational opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged groups, children with disabilities, girls, and learners from rural, tribal and marginalized communities. This would in-turn generate better economic outcomes for the nation's development too.

The implementation of NEP 2020 has brought about one of the most important structural changes, which was the transformation of the conventional 10+2 education model into a new and innovative 5+3+3+4 curricular frame that is developmentally suitable and based on children's cognitive growth stages from early childhood to the end of secondary school. This new system includes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and emphasizes the idea of significant influence of early years on cognitive development and socio-emotional growth. The foundational level of the system focuses on game and activity learning, while the preparatory and primary years introduce experiential and conceptual learning, discovering new things and critical thinking, as well as multi-disciplinary approach. The secondary education system provides a higher level of freedom as children can choose the subjects which they are interested in and which they would like to study both in scientific fields and in humanities or vocational institutions. This is an evidence of the NEP 2020 realization of the principle of individualized and personalized education where the needs, interests, and goals of students play the main role in their learning experience. The policy also transitions educational philosophy from rote learning to competence-based education, which focuses on conceptual understanding, knowledge application, analytical

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thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem solving. The proposal involves the reduction of

curricular material to only its most important aspects, meaning greater opportunity for practical learning, project-based activities, inquiry-based activities, arts integration, sports, environmental education, and life skills. The assessment reform subsection is also important, in that board examinations are being reformed to test higher levels of thinking rather than simply remembering information, and continuous formative assessment is encouraged throughout the teaching process. Another significant reform promoted by the policy is multilingualism in different stages of education, starting from the mother tongue or regional language as the language of instruction until Grade 5 or even till the end of Grade 8.

The NEP 2020 keeps the objective of eliminating long-standing separation between academic and vocational learning in-tact. Students are required to participate in internships with local artisans, industries and service providers, from as early as Grade 6 onwards. This exposure to professional work-environments enables them to acquire practical skills, entrepreneurial abilities and workplace experience alongside formal education. The policy further advocates the integration of coding, financial literacy, health education, environmental sustainability, constitutional values, ethics and other modern competencies in school curricula. As for reforming higher education, the new set of rules promotes multidisciplinary universities, flexible undergraduate programmes with multiple entry and exit options, the Academic Bank of Credits for seamless academic mobility, institutional autonomy and a stronger culture of research through the establishment of the National Research Foundation. In the field of professional education, the goal is to have interdisciplinary programs in the areas of engineering, medicine, agriculture, law, and teacher training, thus promoting the concepts of creativity, interaction, and comprehensive learning across the various disciplines. The plan states that all affiliated colleges will turn into independent degree-giving colleges, which will result in the improvement of management, quality of education, and accountability. Technology plays one of the major parts in the New Educational Policy 2020 as it is considered to be an efficient factor in educational transformation. The policy states that digital technology can definitely improve the level of accessibility, quality, equity, governance, and efficiency in various educational levels if it is implemented in the right way and in a proper manner. It promotes the use of different digital platforms, blended learning, virtual classes, e-assessments, storage of educational materials, and adaptive learning technologies as the additions to the traditional way of teaching. Various initiatives have been improved, e.g., DIKSHA, SWAYAM, SWAYAM PRABHA, PM e-VIDYA, National Digital Library, etc. In addition, these initiatives provide the required educational resources for teachers and learners in the country.

The NEP promotes the heightened and ethical use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, blockchain, cloud computing, virtual reality, augmented reality, and so on, all in a bid to personalize the learning experiences, improve educational planning and accessibility, while strengthening institutional governance and evidence-based decision-making processes too. Admissions are getting streamlined swiftly and effectively, distance learning is also better facilitated, examinations and student records are managed substantially, including academic credit transfers and institutional management through integrated digital governance systems. The professional development of teachers is becoming more reliant on online training programs and digital teaching aids, thus providing an opportunity for teachers to engage in ongoing improvement of their teaching skills. Moreover, NEP 2020 states that while technology integration is important, the digital gap should also be minimised by making sure that internet services have been improved, digital devices made inexpensive, and programs on improving digital literacy and local content in various languages implemented. With the aim to develop education system that is flexible, inclusive, competitive and capable of preparing learners to meet present-day challenges, the National Education Policy 2020 seeks to introduce structural changes into the educational system reform, as well as learner-centred pedagogical approaches, multidisciplinary education, competency-based curricula, vocational training, research development and technology application.

Implementation Strategies and Challenges

The successful implementation of the NEP 2020 needs phased and collaborative approaches, essentially involving the Union and State Governments, educational institutions, regulatory bodies, teachers, parents, communities, industry and even civil society organizations. Education is listed in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India, hence effective implementation of educational policies and frameworks requires concerted efforts from both central and state actors while ensuring enough flexibility for states to mould their own approach according to state specific requirements. The Ministry of Education has implemented a number of measures as part of NEP 2020, which includes formation of National Curriculum Framework(NCF), launching National initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), establishment of Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), National Credit Framework (NCrF), to name a few. With the implementation of reforms in education, schools are now adopting curriculum focusing on competency-based education while universities are offering four-year undergraduate programmes apart from providing various options such as credit transfers and multiple exit options.

One of the foremost challenges is inadequate public investment in education. The policy proposes increasing the expenditure in the education sector to reach approximately 6 percent of the GDP, a goal that remains mostly unachieved for the last several decades. Infrastructure development, staff hiring, laboratory modernization, technological implementation, research funding, general curriculum creation, and multidimensional institutions formation are all hampered by limited funding. Many public schools still suffer from the lack of classrooms, libraries, laboratories, electricity, drinking water, sanitary facilities, sport facilities, and internet access, specifically in rural, tribal,

mountainous, and poor areas. Such differences in infrastructure result in difficulties with achieving the policy's aim of accessible and quality competency-based education by means of distance learning, vocational training, and experience-based pedagogy. Teacher training is another significant issue. The NEP 2020 urges educators to replace the traditional academia-focused pedagogy with the learner-focused one. However, many of them need a lot of training to introduce a new curriculum, practice ongoing assessment, apply multilingual learning, and employ digital tools. Moreover, teacher shortages, uneven work distribution, employment on contractual basis, too many administrative duties, and lack of possibilities of further professional improvement negatively influence the quality of education in many regions.

If there is continued dedication and follow-through from the government, adequate funding and cooperation of relevant authorities, and commitment to the participation of all relevant players, NEP 2020 will likely turn into a powerful tool in the long run. The policy has great potential to revolutionize the education sector of India by encouraging creativity, critical thinking, research, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, moral value formation, and lifelong learning. All these measures will contribute greatly to the achievement of the main goals of NEP 2020. Better public funding of education, expansion of digital infrastructure, improvement of teacher training programs, encouragement of multiple ways of learning, promotion of interdisciplinary research, facilitation of vocational education, and ensuring transparent governance will help to a great extent. Such partnerships between governments, universities, schools, industries, corporations, countries, and NGOs will help share knowledge with the world. As India is striving for being thought of as a country of knowledge economy and achieving the target of Viksit Bharat 2047, NEP 2020 offers an effective outline for establishing internationally recognized professionals. Successful application of the policy would lead to the improvement of all the areas in the education sector and on a wider scale would contribute to the development of equality, economy, innovation, democracy, and sustainability.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy, formed in 2020, is an exceptional initiative designed to change the education system in India based on learner-focused educational practices, multidisciplinary studies, competency-based education, adopting technology, fostering research, and providing autonomy to institutions. The focus on literacy, flexibility, inclusiveness, vocational education, and holistic development shows that NEP 2020 takes into account current trends in the educational sphere while also focusing on the needs of India, including social development. Nevertheless, in order to achieve the ambitious goals of NEP 2020, the involvement of institutions with sufficient funding, efficient administration, trained professors, due infrastructure, digital education, and involvement of all the people engaged in the process is required..

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