

## National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Challenges and Opportunities

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### Abstract

Education is an integral and vital part of human development. India has witnessed three education policies in 74 years of her independence. NEP 2020 is a clear departure from the traditional and structured form of education in India as formulated by its predecessors.

The new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) was developed to overcome the flaws of earlier educational strategies. The five pillars of accessibility, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability serve as its foundation. By transforming school and college education more comprehensive, flexible, interdisciplinary, adapted to 21st century demands, and focused on bringing out the unique attributes of each student, this approach aims to transform India into a thriving knowledge society and worldwide knowledge superpower. The national education policy, currently launched, focuses on India-centric education system in 2020, which will contribute to making our nation again a world guru by providing all high quality education. The National Policy on Education (NEP) 2020 recommends innovative major changes in teacher education. The goal is ambitious, but whether it genuinely fosters an all-encompassing culture will depend on how successfully it is carried out. The current paper is an attempt to examine the National Education Policy 2020 in the context of paradigm changes in terms of opportunities and challenges in the teacher education sector. The objective of this paper is to study the NEP 2020, its features and challenges of implementation of NEP 2020.

**Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Opportunities and Challenges, Teacher Education, Sustainability, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)**

**Introduction:** Education is a basis on which the development and empowerment of a Nation depends. Education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the World. A Nation's development can be visualized from its focus on education. The ancient Indian thinkers regarded education as an important tool to bring an ignorant person on the path of an intellectual, progressive, moral and virtuous course of life. Education is the 'third eye' of a man, which gives him an insight into all affairs and teaches him how to act; it leads us to our salvation.

The history of education began with teaching of traditional elements such as Indian religions, Indian mathematics, Indian logic at early Hindu and Buddhist centers of learning such as ancient Takshashila and Nalanda Before Christ (BC). From the Vedic education system at Gurukul to the English medium education system at boarding, India always adopted an advanced educational system in the Society. Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits.

After Independence, the education system of India gets streamlined through its successive, progressive and innovative effort made through formulation of National education policies. Though education became the responsibility of both the State and Central Government after the adoption of the Constitution of India in 1950, but in reality, the formulation of various National Education Policies in 1968, 1979 (draft), 1986 and 1992 and enactment of Right to Education Act 2009 have brought massive changes in the education sector of India. India's adoption to the Global Education Development Agenda in 2015 reflected in Sustainable Development Goal-4 to 'ensure education and promote life-long opportunities for all by 2030' is considered as an another historic effort for the educational upliftment of the socio-economically disadvantaged groups at par with the advantaged groups of the society. Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. The National Education Policy-2020 attempts to address the growing inequality and inequity plaguing India's education system today. Among other, the NEP 2020 recognizes high drop-out rates among socio-economic strata and vulnerable minorities.

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Every child has right for free and compulsory education at least for the elementary and fundamental stages of schooling. The enactment of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act2009 is a way forwarded towards declaring education as a fundamental right of every Indians. Indian education system now also continues to handle with challenges of inequality and exclusion. Access to quality school education is still a distant dream for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups of people. The National Education Policy-2020 is considered as a historic effort and first edition policy after thirty-four years, which attempts to address the growing inequality in Country's education system. It established high priorities for quality learning for ensuring inclusive and equitable education keeping in view Goal-4 of the Sustainable Development by 2030.

## National Education Policy 2020

The Union Cabinet of India approved the National Education Policy on July 29, 2020. The new education policy aims to pave the way for transformational improvements in India's school and higher education systems. The government of India introduced a new policy to globalize education from preschool to the secondary level.

NEP 2020 aims to replace the present 10+2 system with the latest 5+3+3+4 curricular structure corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. The salient features of NEP 2020 are set to improve the education quality by giving equal importance to creativity and innovation and striving to transform India into a “vibrant knowledge society” over the next decade. The National Education Policy as submitted by the Kasturirangan Committee submitted an education policy that seeks to address the following challenges facing the existing education system:

1. Quality
  2. Affordability
  3. Equity
  4. Access
  5. Accountability
- The policy provides for reforms at all levels of education from school to higher education.
  - NEP aims to increase the focus on strengthening teacher training, reforming the existing exam system, early childhood care and restructuring the regulatory framework of education.
  - Other intentions of the NEP include:
    - Increasing public investment in education,
    - Setting up NEC (National Education Commission),
    - Increasing focus on vocational and adult education,
    - Strengthening the use of technology, etc.

## Salient features of NEP 2020

The salient features of NEP 2020 were formulated based on the foundational pillars of Access, Quality, Equity, Affordability and Accountability. The revised policy is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It focuses on remolding India into a global knowledge superpower by making school education more holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, and suited to 21st-century requirements and aimed at bringing out the individual capabilities of each student. Some of the salient features of NEP 2020 are:

### 1) Ensuring universal access at all levels of school education

National Education Policy 2020 focuses on ensuring universal access to school education at all levels. Some of the ways to achieve this are:

- Infrastructure support
- Tracking the progress of students and their learning levels
- Facilitating different modes of learning, including both formal and in-formal education modes
- Introduction of counsellors and well-trained social workers into the schooling system.
- Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes for classes 3, 5 and 8 through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools (SOS).
- Secondary education programmes equivalent to classes 10 and 12.
- Vocational education courses/programmes from preschool to Grade 12 and promotion of adult literacy and life-enrichment programmes.

### 2) Attaining Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

Other important feature of NEP 2020 is recognizing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy as an urgent and essential prerequisite to learning. NEP 2020 calls for building the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by MHRD. In this mission, the states will prepare an implementation plan to achieve foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary school students until grade 3 by 2025.

### 3) Reforms in school curricula and pedagogy

The new school curricula and pedagogy aim for the holistic development of students by equipping them with vital 21st-century skills, reducing curricular content to improve essential

learning and critical thinking and emphasizing experiential learning. This will allow students to have increased flexibility and choice of subjects. There will be no hard separations between arts and sciences, between vocational and academic streams, and between curricular and extracurricular activities.

In addition, vocational education will be introduced during Grades 6-8, with internship opportunities offered under a practice-based curriculum designed by NCERT while framing a new National Curriculum Framework for School (NCFSE).

#### **4) Focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**

With the focus on Early Childhood Care and Education, the old 10+2 structure is replaced by a new 5+3+3+4 model to be in tune with the ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. This is one of the main salient features of NEP 2020, which will bring the formerly uncovered age group of three-six years under formal school curriculum guidelines. This is because the age group of 3-8 years has been recognized globally as a critical time for the development of the mental abilities of a child.

#### **5) New Curricular and Pedagogical Structure**

With an emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education, NCERT will develop a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education known as NCPFECCE. This will cover the children up to the age group of 8. Early Childhood Care and Education will be delivered through an extensive network of institutions like Anganwadi's and pre-schools. The teachers and Anganwadi workers will be trained as per the ECCE pedagogy and curriculum.

The National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) will be developed by NCERT and it will be implemented jointly by the Ministries of HRD, Women and Child Development (WCD), Health and Family Welfare (HFW), and Tribal Affairs.

#### **6) Achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy**

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy is a mandatory prerequisite to learning and development. The states will prepare an implementation plan to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools for all learners by grade 3 by 2025.

#### **7) Major Reforms in School Curriculum & Pedagogy**

The new school curriculum will be designed with the aim for the holistic development of learners which includes equipping them with 21st-century skills and more emphasis will be

given on critical thinking and experimental learning. Students will be provided with flexibility in choosing subjects of their interest. Important modification in the curriculum will not lead to rigid separation between arts and sciences, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and vocational and academic streams.

## **8) School Governance**

The schools should be organised into complexes or clusters as an institution of learning and all-around development of children. School should be a place where students can learn life skills, develop basic etiquette, and grow as responsible human beings. Schools should possess the basic facilities and resources like infrastructure, libraries and a professional teaching community.

The new education policy is based on a certain set of principles that will help the youth of India to get a world-class, high-quality education system. The purpose of this new education policy is not limited to educating the masses but to make them responsible human beings. The objectives of NEP 2020 are as follows:

- The core objectives of the new education system are to develop good character among the individuals and to be a good human being that contribute to the society. One of the key objectives of education is to develop rational thought and action, having compassion and empathy, creative imagination and ethical values.
- The new education policy focuses on the unique capabilities of each student. It helps in recognizing, identifying & nurturing the qualities of student with the help of parents and teachers for all-around development in academic and non-academic areas of life.
- The priority is given to foundational literacy and Numeracy to the students. The new education policy aims to achieve this in all students by Grade 3.
- There is no Science, Arts & Commerce etc. Stream. New education policy is to provide flexibility of choosing their programmes and subjects. This will help students to choose their own paths according to their talent and interests.
- Equal priorities will be given to different areas of learning with no hard separations between arts and sciences. Curricular and extracurricular activities and vocational and academic streams will be treated as more or less the same.

- For this multidisciplinary world, a multidisciplinary and holistic education will be implemented across sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports fields.
- More emphasis will be given to the conceptual understanding of the subject rather than learning for the exams.
- Students will be made to think creative and critical thinking will be encouraged.
- The new national education policy will teach and instill human ethics and constitutional values like empathy, responsibility, cleanliness, respect for others, respect for public property, scientific temper, equality etc.
- The new education policy will play a key role in promoting multilingualism, Local Indian languages and the power of language in teaching and learning.
- Communication skills, cooperation, and teamwork are by far the most important and basic life skills required in every phase of life, the new education curriculum will be designed to incorporate these skills from a very young age.
- The policy focuses on regular formative assessment for learning rather than the summative assessment that encourages today's 'coaching culture'.
- Technology is the future of education, hence the extensive use of technology in teaching, learning & assessment will help students, teachers and parents.
- The education system is designed to ensure full equity and inclusion of all educational decisions so that all students are able to thrive right from early childhood care to school education and to higher education.
- Teachers and faculty members are the backbones of the education system. Rigorous efforts will be carried out in their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive working environments and service conditions.
- A rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions.



## Opportunities in NEP 2020

### Overall change:

Renaming the ministry: The Ministry of Human Resource and Development will now be called the Ministry of Education. This is apparently in order to bring the focus back to education.

- The Centre and states will work together to increase public investment in education to 6% of GDP. Currently the expenditure stands at 3% of GDP in 2018-19 (the Economic Survey).
- An extension of the RTE to cover a larger age group: The policy proposes to increase the ambit of the RTE to include children from the ages 3 to 18. Currently it covers children between 6 to 14 years. This is long overdue. However, Stakeholders like private institutes and activists are divided over the cost of implementation of this grand vision. Private institutes have remained exclusionary and disable access to education for those who come under the reserved 25% category prescribed by RTE by levying non-educational fees. Also, they complain that the government usually does not pay them in time.
- The three-language formula has resurfaced in a new avatar in the NEP 2020. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State.
- Breakfast is to be added to the mid-day meal program.

### Setup of new institutions/boards/zones/funds/frameworks:

- Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) by 2022: NEP 2020 proposes to set up a super regulator to address the current issue of multiple regulators to deal with accreditation, funding and standard setting. HECI will function as the single overarching body for all higher education, excluding medical and legal studies, and replace all other regulatory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) or the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Its four independent verticals (National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), National Accreditation Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) & General Education Council (GEC) will also be responsible for all grants, funding, standards and accreditation, making it one of the most centralized regulatory institution in the country.
- National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST): The NPST aims to make the recruitment of teachers more transparent. It will be developed by the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) by 2022.



• A School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF) will also be developed. • Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU) and a National Research Foundation (NRF).

• A National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) will be created to encourage the use of technology in college education.

• Also, the NEP 2020 stresses that educationists will be appointed on the Board of Governance of institutions, to depoliticize them.

### **Major changes in School Education:**

• Adoption of 5+3+3+4 Structure: The policy recommends a move away from the previous 10+2 structure (10 years of primary and 2 years of secondary education). There will now be 5 years of foundational education, 3 years of preparatory, 3 years of middle and 4 years of secondary schooling. Pre-school education will gain focus in the initial 5 years of learning.

• Flexibility to choose subjects across streams: All subjects will be offered at two levels of proficiency (introductory and advanced) and will be treated equally (science will not be pitted against social sciences and also not be assigned as per the percentage scored in the previous grade).

• Board exams will test core competencies, could become modular (Board exams for Grade 10 and 12 will be continued, all students will take school examinations in Grades 3, 5, and 8 which will be conducted by the appropriate authority.), and will be offered twice a year. The second attempt will provide an opportunity to improve scores.

• Bag-less days: 10 days in a year will be dedicated to vocational courses of choice (informal internships) from Grade 6th onwards. This is to include vocational training in the curriculum, making it more practical.

• Mother tongue to be a medium of instruction till 5th grade: but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. The policy doesn't keep children of migrant labourers and people in transferrable jobs at the center of this decision, however.

### **Major changes in Higher Education:**

• 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio to be achieved by 2035. Currently it's at 26.4%, among both boys and girls. However, a strong focus on promoting women to pursue higher education is lacking.

- Proposal to set up Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). As discussed above, this will be set up as a super-regulator and centralize multiple functions across different verticals under its ambit.
- A National Testing Agency to conduct a common entrance exam for colleges twice a year. This is to follow a Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT, used for college admissions in the United States) like structure for admissions in graduate programs.
- Mid-term dropouts from college will be given credits and an option to complete their degree after a break (a limited period). Credit transfers and academic banks of credits are to be introduced.
- Dropouts can use the credits for transferring from one university to another. The details of execution for all of this are unclear however.
- Affiliations with universities are to end and over the next 15 years colleges will be given the autonomy to provide degrees. The deemed university status is to end as well.
- Fee cap over private institutions for higher education: An awaited move, but it will need private institutes to apply for a loan at HECI and claim funding from the government to run effectively. As per speculation, a large chunk of budgetary allocation will be channeled to private universities via the loan route.
- Graduate programs for 4 years, PG (Post graduate) programs for 1 or 2 years and M.Phil. programs to be discontinued

## **NEP 2020: The Future**

In order to lay the framework for educational complexes, a wider range of subjects in higher education institutions, and flexible entry-exit programmes in colleges and universities, the administration intends to swiftly implement NEP 2020 throughout the states. The policy would be implemented in FY22 by state institutions including colleges and universities, according to Mr. Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Education. Accordingly, in August 2021, Karnataka became the first state to mandate the adoption of the NEP starting in FY22. The government also wants to market India as a top location for learning abroad. 200,000 Indian students study abroad each year, according to the Ministry of Education, costing the country Rs. 50,000 crore (US\$6.7 billion) annually. However, it is anticipated that 48,000 overseas students will study in Indian institutes. The government is concentrating on a number of initiatives to entice more foreign students to India, such as providing incentives to

foreign institutions to establish campuses there and forming alliances with foreign universities to launch collaborative training programmes. The government also plans to create offshore campuses to draw foreign students and persuade them to enroll in shortened courses at Indian colleges.

Additionally, the NEP is posing great challenges toward modernizing the educational system of the nation and adapting it to the changing needs of young people while providing them with industry-relevant skills. Furthermore, it is predicted that the state government's increased focus on NEP implementation, along with rising private involvement in offering online courses in colleges and universities, will lead to better NEP implementation and expand the learning opportunities available to international students.

## **Challenges in implementation of NEP 2020**

NEP 2020 is a revolutionary policy which has the immense potential to change the socio-economic structure of the society. It can smooth the way for more inclusive learning of all classes of students. But there is always a huge gap between policy framing and its execution. Successful execution needs a large-scale implementation plan. NEP 2020 requires a huge number of educational buildings to ensure 100% GER as there is huge number of children who are presently outside the formal schooling system. To bring back into mainstream schooling and to retain them in study, immense effort is also necessary. It requires a sizable investment to build the schools, colleges and other campuses to accommodate all the students. It also needs a vast number of teachers for this revamped pedagogy with technical knowledge. To meet the expenses for educational infrastructures, huge level of recruitment, operational expenses and to meet the expenditure for food to be given as breakfast, NEP 2020 proposes increase in education expenses from 4.6% to 6% of GDP. But, first of all, the economic situation of the country is not favourable in the present situation to augment the expenses for education. Due to covid-19 pandemic there were countrywide lockdowns in a phased manner for several months in 2020 and economic activities came to standstill for quite a long period of time, GDP was all time low, government tax collections were critically low and fiscal deficit was higher than even pre-covid era. Presently, in the second wave of covid-19, lockdown has already started in some states. So, first of all India needs a large stimulus to revive this tottering economy from financial depression and then only we can think of increasing the GDP share on education. Secondly, it is not clear how this additional

expenditure will be borne and how it will be shared between central and state governments. There is no transparent commitment that can hold the government answerable. Another point is that NEP 2020 proposes that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction up to grade-V. It must be mentioned that, NEP 2020 proposes to bring Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) under the scope of formal schooling for which it relies on Anganwari workers, who are already exhausted with workload of health and nutrition matters and still not recognized as formal employees. They are very low-paid workers and since a long time they are demanding for proper wages with better recognition. Their demands are overlooked but NEP proposes to impose extra work burden on them without giving undue recognition. It can be seen as a patriarchal attitude where women's labour is seen as unimportant. The most edged criticism against NEP has been that it would lead to the privatization of higher education which is a contradiction of social justice. NEP aims to gradually reduce the affiliation system to a university in the next 15 years and allow autonomy to privatization. It will badly affect the access to higher educational institutions especially for the rural students or backward class students. Moreover, it will pave the path for corporate sector for making modification of education. Government is trying to avoid its own responsibilities from providing quality higher education for all and instead is inviting foreign universities in the field of higher education. They will definitely impose higher level tuition fees which will create caste and class based inequalities in education further.

This visionary policy might end up helping the rich students ignoring the crisis in education among the marginalized majority in rural areas who are in vicious cycles of disadvantages. There is no comprehensive roadmap and reasonable implementation strategy to execute this grand vision. Moreover, NEP 2020 is silent on the Right to Education Act, 2009. NEP talks about universalization of school education from 3-18 years without making it a legal right. So, there is no mandatory system for the central and state governments to make it a truth. Without the legal backing of RTE Act, 2009, universalization of education is almost impossible.

## **Conclusion:**

78% of the institutions reported inadequate technological infrastructure. Moreover outdated and l intent connectivity hindered technology integration. Availability of insufficient digital resources posed challenges in delivering modern education.

NEP envisions many opportunities for students to grow and develop and teachers as well. NEP 2020 makes a bold prescription to free our schools, colleges and universities from periodic inspections and place them on the path of self-assessment and voluntary declaration. The purpose of NEP 2020 is to provide equitable and inclusive education to all, ensuring that no child is left behind without education. It strives to bridge the rural-urban and gender gaps in education while also promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism.

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