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Policy Paper

Critical Analysis of National Education Policy 2020

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper provides a comprehensive overview of National Education Policy 2020 which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on July 29, 2020. The new policy replaces the older education policy of 1986. NEP 2020 aims to bring revolutionary changes to the Indian educational system. NEP 2020 cannot only be seen as an educational policy, its impact whether positive or negative to the socio-economic reality of India is significant. This policy paper will be giving a summary of recommendations made by NEP 2020 in school education, higher education, and other areas and also providing a critique of the policy along with recommendations for imparting a holistic point of view.

2. INTRODUCTION

National Education Policy is a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in the country. India, since its independence, has tried to improve its literacy rate and has come a long way, but the quality of education still needs to be worked upon. In 1964, a 17 member committee was constituted for the drafting of an education policy under the then UGC chairperson D.S Kothari. The leaders felt the need to change the system which lacked vision. Based on the recommendations of the Kothari commission the parliament passed the first National Education Policy in 1968. The second NEP came in 1986 under the Rajiv Gandhi government and was revised during P.V Narasimha Rao's government in 1992. NEP 2020 replaces the 1986 policy which was in practice for 34 years. The education sector needs revolutionary reforms but with calculated risks. Can NEP 2020 be that long-awaited reform?

2.1 SCHOOL EDUCATION

Restructuring and redesigning school curriculum:

The current 10+2 structure of school education will be changed into a more comprehensive 5-3-3-4 setup comprising of:

- (i) three years of preparatory stage (ages:8 to 11/classes:3 to 5)
- (ii) three years of middle stage (ages:11 to 14/classes:6 to 8)
- (iii) three years of secondary stage (ages:14 to 18/classes:9 to 12)

Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE): ECCE focuses on introducing flexible, and activity-based learning consisting of the alphabet, languages, colours, numbers, music, puzzles, and painting etc. for children of age group 3-6. NCERT will work on developing a national curriculum for ECCE which will be delivered through:

- (i) stand-alone anganwadis,
- (ii) anganwadis located within primary schools,
- (iii) pre-primary sections in existing primary schools, and
- (iv) stand-alone pre-schools.

Anganwadi workers with a minimum of senior secondary qualification will be provided with a six-month certification programme in ECCE.

Ensuring and achieving foundational literacy: National Mission on Foundational literacy and numeracy will be set up under the MHRD with the goal of providing foundational literacy and numeracy to all students by grade 3. These goals must be achieved by 2025 and all state governments must be ready to implement these plans. A national repository of high-quality resources for the same will be made available on DIKSHA (government's e-learning platform).

Increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio and ensuring inclusivity: While the Right to Education Act, 2009 was successful in achieving its goal of near-universal-enrolment in elementary education, a declining GER (gross enrolment ratio) has been observed as students move to higher grades. The decline in the GER is higher for certain socio-economically disadvantaged groups based on:

- (i) gender,
- (ii) socio-cultural identities,
- (iii) geographical identities,

- (iv) socio-economic identities,
- (v) disabilities.

The Committee emphasises on setting up of special education zones in specific areas and to strengthen targeted schemes for disadvantaged groups. A gender inclusion fund has also been provisioned for.

Reforms in school curriculum: Focus will be concentrated around critical thinking, analysis based learning and discussions, so the curriculum will be reduced to its essential core contents. NCERT will undertake the formulation of a new and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for School Education, NCFSE 2020–21. More flexible choices will be provided to students in terms of subjects of study, especially in secondary school. The NCFSE document shall henceforth be revisited and updated once every 5–10 years as per the frontline curriculum.

The medium of instruction: Medium of instruction should be local language/ mother-tongue of a child at least till grade five, and preferably till grade eight. No language shall be imposed on any state, a more flexible approach towards the current three language formula will be adopted. States, regions, and students themselves, will have a say in the choice of the three languages but at least two of them have to be native to India. At all levels, Sanskrit shall be offered as an option. Efforts will be made to prepare high-quality bilingual textbooks and teaching-learning materials for Science and Mathematics.

Reform in assessment method: The committee recommends that board examinations should test core concepts covering a range of subjects to discourage coaching culture. Students' progress will be tracked throughout their school by conducting examinations in grades three, five, and eight whose results will be used to further improve the school education system. Students will be provided with the option to take the exams on up to two occasions during a given year. Further, to especially assess and evaluate students, a National Assessment Centre will be set up under the MHRD.

University entrance exams will be conducted on similar principles. The National Test Agency (NTA) will offer high-quality aptitude tests and exams specialised in common subjects as well like sciences, arts, languages, humanities, vocational subjects and so at least twice a year. The exams hence conducted will test the basic understanding, applied knowledge and concepts of the students and therefore will do away with the need for coaching.

Changes in approach to school education: To combine high-quality content, pedagogy, and practical training, existing B.Ed. programme is replaced by a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme. TETs (Teacher Eligibility Tests) shall be strengthened to include better test material. Teachers will be required to complete at least 50 hours of continuous professional development training every year. Teachers should not be engaged in non-teaching administrative activities and excessive unnecessary transfers should be stopped. A technology-based comprehensive calculated exercise will be carried out to map subject wise teacher vacancies over the next two decades.

Ensuring effective governance: NEP recommends grouping schools with very low admissions to form a school complex. School Complex will consist of one Secondary school and other schools, anganwadis in a 5–10 km radius to ensure adequate infrastructural resources, the adequate student-teacher ratio for all subjects, and effective governance of schools.

Regulation of schools: The committee recommends that the Department of School Education should only be involved in policymaking and overall monitoring, and should not be responsible for all functions of governance and regulation of school education so as to avoid conflict of interest and centralisation of power. An independent State School Standards Authority should be set up in each state to prescribe basic uniform standards for public and private schools.

In short, the development of mechanisms that are effective, and timely for students will be accorded high priority and everything to ensure their best will be done according to the policy.

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

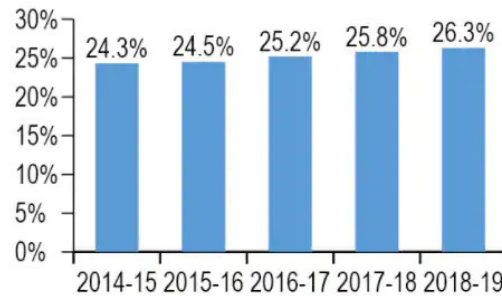
The Indian higher education system is highly fragmented in nature with over 50,000 higher educational institutions offering a single programme, and some of them are functioning with 100 students without reasonable education taking place. To address the issues in the current system of education the policy envisions the following changes:

Restructuring the higher education system: Higher Education Institutions (HEI) will be reorganized into three main groups,

- 1) Research universities focusing particularly on research as well as teaching.
- 2) Teaching universities focusing only on teaching.
- 3) Degree-granting colleges focusing on undergraduate teaching.

Large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges with at least one in every district will be established. By 2030, the policy aims to have one multi-disciplinary HEI in every district. These institutions will be gradually transformed into an educational structure with full financial-administrative-academic powers.

Improving Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER): In order to increase GER in the country, the option to run distant learning programmes will be given to institutions. This will increase GER and accessibility to higher education for everyone. NEP 2020 aims to increase GER by 50 per cent in 2035. The GER during 2018-19 was 26.3 per cent



Sources: All India Survey on Higher Education, MHRD; PRS.

Multidisciplinary structure for education: This particular recommendation aims to highlight the fragmentation of Indian higher education system. Over 3000 students will be included in Multidisciplinary Universities, colleges, and HEI clusters, and it will enable to build a vibrant community consisting of scholars, peers. Moreover, according to NEP 2020 diversity of students will enable the whole system to gather artistic, analytic, and creative skills. Development of active research communities across disciplines which includes cross-disciplinary research, increasing material and human resource efficiency in higher education is another aim. HEIs will be focusing on a multidisciplinary approach by integrating humanities and arts subjects with science, technology, engineering and mathematics. More flexibility in undergraduate programmes will be provided. With multiple exit options, the policy recommends the following: give one year certificate to those who completed one year, diploma and bachelor's degree for 2 and 3-year completion subsequently. A research degree will be given after completing 4 years. The degree will be awarded on the basis of credits, an academic bank of credit will be made to store academic credit gained from various HEIs. M.Phil programme will be dropped.

New regulatory system: The policy recommends a new regulatory system, to give more autonomy and empowerment for institutions and gradually stop the system of affiliated colleges within a period of 15 years. The maximum number of colleges that can be affiliated by a University shall not be exceeded above 300, by 2025. For achieving these, new Universities can be established. The functions of accreditation, funding, and setting academic standards will be done by independent bodies. The aim of setting up an independent body is to avoid conflict of interest and concentration of power. Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be established with four independent verticals:

- 1) National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NEHRA) will be set up to regulate the entire higher education sector except for legal and medical education in a “light” but tight manner.
- 2) National Accreditation Council will be established for accreditation of institutions
- 3) The General Education Council will be established to frame 'graduate attributes' and for specifying curriculum framework.

Encouraging Research and Innovation: Countries like USA, South Korea, and Israel spend a significant amount of their GDP (2.8, 4.2, 4.3 per cent respectively) on research and innovation whereas, India spends a mere 0.69 per cent of its GDP on it. NEP recommends setting up the National Research Foundation for funding and facilitating quality research in India and will collaborate independently with agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology, Indian Council of Medical Research which are currently funding and will continue to fund independent projects.

Foreign investment and international outreach in education: A legislative framework facilitating and encouraging selected top global institutions and universities to set up their campuses and branches in India. Further, high performing Indian universities will be aided and encouraged to set up campuses in foreign countries to grow the outreach and push them to further enhance the current standard of education. Universities setting up Campuses in India will be exempted from regulatory and governance norms just as autonomous institutions of the country.

Formal vocational education: Merely 5% (approx.) of the workforce of age group 19–24 have received formal vocational education in India from 2012–2017. This is in stark contrast to countries like the USA, Germany, South Korea where this percentage of the workforce that received vocational education is 52%, 75% and 96% respectively. NEP recommends vocational education to be integrated into phases at all levels of education for the next 10 years. A national committee for integration of vocational education for the same purpose will be set up under the MHRD. For each discipline vocation and profession, a national skills qualification framework will be devised. To ensure a minimum of 50% of learners (in school and higher education) are exposed to vocational education by 2025 is the aim of the NEP.

2.3 OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS OF NEP 2020

Adult education: A National Adult Education Framework will be developed by a new constituent body of NCERT focusing on 5 broad areas: (a) foundational literacy and numeracy; (b) critical life skills (including financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, health care awareness, child care and education, and family welfare); (c) vocational skills development (with a view towards obtaining local employment); (d) basic education (including preparatory, middle, and secondary stage); and (e) continuing education (via engaging in arts, sciences, technology, culture, sports, and recreation)

Financing education: NEP proposes to invest 6% of GDP in the education sector by both central government and state governments. The first National Education Policy of 1968 also proposed to spend 6% of GDP on education as a public investment; the 1986 National Policy on education endorsed the same. According to the economic survey of 2018–19, India has only spent 3% of its GDP on education. The policy mentions rejuvenation, active promotion, and encouragement for private philanthropic investments.

Technology use and integration: National Education Alliance for Technology (NEAT), an autonomous body will be created to facilitate decision making on the induction, deployment and use of technology at both school and higher education levels. Independent evidence-based advice on technological interventions will be provided by NEAT to central government and state government agencies.

Digital education: To make digital education more inclusive and equally accessible the following recommendations were made: 1) creation of digital repositories and virtual labs 2) development of online teaching platforms, 3) using television, and media platforms for imparting education in areas where digital technology is inaccessible, 4) giving training to teachers for becoming high-quality content creators.

3. MAJOR WEAKNESS

NEP as a policy document is progressive in nature because of the foundation it lays down this includes skills of literacy, numeracy and number of other competencies and priority for gross enrolment ratio, increasing the investment in education, ensuring universal access to education make this policy to stand out, but we have to rethink the underlying 'progressiveness in NEP which is lacking class consciousness'.

1. Many scholars and academicians have criticized the policy stating the lack of vision, the previous NEPs included the same provisions but they were hardly implemented.
2. The policy is not LGBTQIA+ inclusive, as it's not expressly providing provisions or actions for their inclusivity.
3. The policy fails to provide a comprehensive sex education plan in school and college education curriculum. This is an important step while addressing the complex issues associating with gender and sexuality and creating awareness among students.
4. The stakeholders are expressing concerns regarding commercialisation and incoherent privatisation of education, the lack of consulting with states also evoked an impact on cooperative federalism. Further, it just reiterates some of the existing policies.
5. Graded autonomy and subsequent provisions are representing greater privatisation and hierarchization in the higher education system.
6. The policy is not expressly mentioning the benefits to the tribal and marginalised sections of our society.
7. The teacher-student ratio in India is not sufficient to introduce the new language policy in every academic institution. Distributing study material and finding accurate teachers for the position is challenging.
8. Implementing this language policy will further widen the difference between English speaking and non-English speaking population since there is a high chance that most of the private schools will introduce English in early classes whereas government school students will be studying regional languages. This will increase the number of students uncomfortable with English and might intimidate them at later stages.
9. It may be possible that fewer students are interested in completing four-year courses since they can get their diploma in two years. Instead of studying further for two years, they might consider spending these years gaining work experience.
10. Education has suffered a great deal due to the current pandemic on an international level and it suffers almost annually in flood and hurricane-prone regions, but NEP hardly has any provisions dealing with such situations in case they arise.
11. Internet penetration in rural India(27%) is very poor and this leaves rural students at a huge disadvantage. Under Bharat Net Program 40% of villages are yet to have internet connectivity. In situations when education shifts completely to online mode, these students are at a huge disadvantage.
12. Students studying in different states will face great difficulty if the medium of instruction becomes a regional language.
13. Three language formula mandates that two of the languages have to be native to India, and the majority of schools will prefer the third language to be English. That means if a student wants to learn any other foreign language, he will have to opt for the fourth language thus increasing the pressure on them.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Setting up of standing committees for implementation under the ministry of education.
2. **Vernacular languages:** Teachers teaching vernacular languages (Sanskrit as well) should be given proper training and a well-devised structure of syllabus, literature and texts has to be planned and published for these languages.
3. **Medium of communication:** If the medium of communication is regional language until class 5, basics of English will begin from class 6 (English is optional till class 8). Influential schools won't be willing to give up English as a medium of instruction. This may result in great impediments in communication. So, if English is going to remain an official language, it must be taught from the beginning.
4. **Annual Examinations in Junior Classes:** Doing Away with annual examinations and having them in only class 3,5,8 may not be a good idea since they are a check of preparation and learning. Annual examinations should be continued as such and board examinations kind of structure with similar standard paper for all students of class 3,5,8 may be introduced.
5. **Holistic Board Examinations:** Holistics and easier board examinations will ensure a further fall in the quality of education and competence of teachers. Standard of board examinations should be checked. At present thousands of students scored above 95% in class 12 boards, imagine the case then.
6. **Scribes:** A uniform scribe policy under NEP can be introduced under which arrangements for trained and competent scribes can be provided to students with certain physical challenges.
7. **Invigilation:** Invigilation system shall be strengthened a great deal such that if any student is found indulging in unfair means, an action is taken then and there.
8. **Interlinking special schools and integrated schools:** Special Schools are meant to prepare children with certain disabilities for integrated schools. A proper, enhanced curriculum should be designed for special schools including IT education to prepare students to compete with the students of integrated schools.
9. **Right to the universal enjoyment of human rights:** Supreme Court in its historical judgement of article 377 suggested government to undertake programmes of education and promoting awareness to enhance full enjoyment of all human rights by all persons irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The government should pay special attention to this aspect to ensure an encouraging, unbiased future to all.
10. **Reservations to LGBTQ+:** In the same judgement SC directed State and Centre governments to take steps to treat Transgender people as Socially and economically backward classes of citizens and give them appropriate reservations in educational institutions. The government shall adhere to all these directions and take all necessary steps in the direction.
11. **Establishment of hostels for transgenders:** Transgenders usually are excluded a lot from educational institutions; some of them are abandoned, the government can have hostels specifically for transgenders inside the campus.
12. **Formulation of Comprehensive Sex Education Plan:** In order to provide a holistic understanding about sexuality and relations and induce gender equality as well as sensitivity towards underlying issues a comprehensive sex education plan is necessary. This will be crucial in creating an inclusive space for diverse sexual identities and reduce gender stereotypes. The education policies implemented in India all over these years never seriously considered this aspect. **An LGBTQIA inclusive high school education and College education can be achieved through different ways:** including

sexual orientation, gender dysphoria, the anatomy of intersex bodies in the high school curriculum; setting up of LGBTQIA+ resource centres in schools and colleges, ensuring LGBTQIA+ friendly spaces in colleges through the establishment of cells or collectives to create awareness etcetera. This will gradually replace the heteronormative cis narratives on sexuality.

According to the National Family and Health Survey data, around 27 per cent of girls in India get married before 18 years of age, this indicates that sex education is an important means to achieve the end of gender equality and liberate the young minds through creating awareness and providing holistic education environment.

5. CONCLUSION

NEP as a policy is suggesting sweeping changes in the school as well as the higher education system. The policy will be implemented with the collaborative effort of the central government and state governments. The current target is to implement the entire policy by 2040. Through the recommendations from school to college level, the policy aims to facilitate an inclusive, participatory, and holistic approach. This scientific shift to education implemented with necessary amendments by taking the stakeholders reaction into consideration could make a huge impact on our society. The concerns expressed by stakeholders with regard to centralisation tendencies and commercialisation of education is standing as a bane and those flaws need to be addressed. Filling the gap of ignorance to rural, marginalised and the tribal majority is a major task, then only the policy will fulfil the true vision and address the socio-economic reality of India.

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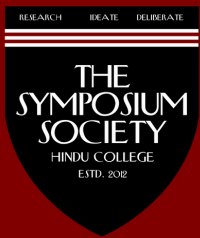
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