

Nep 2020: Features, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) has come after thirty-four long awaited years and there is much hope that this policy will propel the Indian education sector into the 21st century of modern learning. While the NEP 2020 addresses most of the key issues faced by the Indian education system, there are some points that need closer scrutiny. This paper focuses on explaining the key objectives and features of NEP 2020 and then assesses the advantages and disadvantages of the policy. Furthermore, the paper concludes by mentioning some aspects that need to be considered in the way towards transformation of the Indian education sector.

Keywords: NEP,GER,HE,HEI

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I. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) is a comprehensive structure that guides the education sector of a country and aims at fulfilling the three basic premises of education. These three objectives are equity or no differentiation based on gender, universal access to education and good quality education. Till date there have been three National Education Policies implemented in India. The National Education Policy of 1986 under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was revised in 1992 by the P V Narasimha Rao Government and was in use until the recent 2020 NEP announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹

While the NEP of 1986 and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, were able to obtain the equity and universal access objectives of education to a certain extent, they failed at providing good quality education. The ASER 2019 report data proves the low quality of education in India including the abysmal quality of education provided at Government schools and Anganwadis that has resulted in a deep education divide between those attending private and government schools. Furthermore, ASER data of 2019 brings out that a paradigm shift of focus from subject learning to cognitive skills in early years can make a huge impact on basic literacy and numerical skills.²

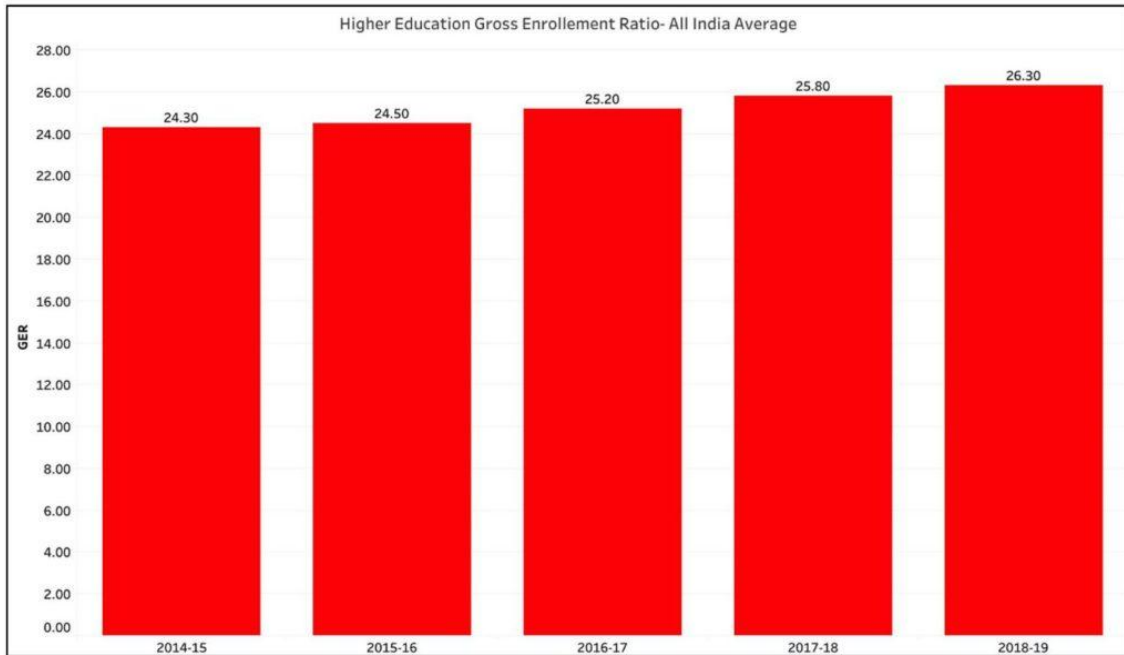
Moreover, while RTE provided for “free and compulsory education” to children of age group six to fourteen years³, there is no arrangement for beyond 14 years of age group. This has resulted in a severe drop in admissions for higher education since most children would drop out of school after the age of fourteen.

As per AISHE data, the higher India Gross Enrolment Ratio as recorded in the past few years has been markedly low. The data below illustrates the GER for the past few years. In the year 2018-19, the GER was only 26.30.

¹<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/reading-new-education-policy-india-schools-colleges-6531603/>

²Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2019

³<https://www.mhrd.gov.in/rte>



Gross Enrolment Rates- Year Wise (AISHE)

The 2020 National Education Policy aims at filling these gaps that were not covered by the revised NEP of 1986 and RTE 2009.

KEY FEATURES OF NEP 2020

The NEP committee under Dr Kasturirangan aims at bringing a paradigm shift to the Indian education landscape. NEP 2020 promotes a multidisciplinary approach to education that can potentially transform India’s human capital. The table below shows the percentage enrolled per group. As can be seen below there a large percentage of different groups are not enrolled into schools. Data shows that minorities which constitute about 20.2 percent of India’s population only have a HE enrollment of 7.5 percent and AISHE’s study shows that the Muslims are in danger of being left behind.

Groups	% of Indian population	% enrolled (GER)
Women	48	26.4
Men	52	26.3
SC	16.6	14.9
ST	8.6	5.5
OBC	40.9	36.3

The Muslims constitute 15 percent of the Indian population and have a HE enrollment of only about 5.2 percent.⁴ NEP 2020 aims at the inclusion of all groups and improving the overall quality of the Indian education.

The five pillars that NEP 2020 rests on are Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. It also corresponds with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 Agenda and aims at establishing a holistic approach towards learning. The main features of NEP 2020 include raising the GER for higher education to 50 percent by 2035 and 100 percent in preschool to secondary level by 2030. Moreover, the 10+2 school curricula structure will be replaced with 5+3+3+4 that will bring the age group of 3-6 years under the umbrella of school curriculum.⁵

In addition, NEP 2020 aims at establishing a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to attain "universal foundational literacy and numeracy" across all primary schools for students up to Class 3 by 2025. Furthermore, it also includes the setting up of National Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework for Early

⁴<https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/national-education-policy-2020-a-new-dawn-for-india/2039280/>

⁵National Educational Policy 2020, Major Transformational Reforms in Education Sector

Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) to strengthen the system of early childhood education including Anganwadis and preschools. NEP 2020 targets at equipping students with vocational skills and providing a flexible holistic education. For this, the separation between arts, commerce and sciences will be removed and greater focus will be laid on experiential learning and vocational education. Classes 3,5 and 8 will have examinations that will be held by an appropriate authority. Class 10 and 12 board examinations will be made "easier" with an objective of holistic growth of students. In order to focus on multilingualism, the policy includes local / regional / mother language being used as a medium of teaching till at least class 5. Furthermore, a National Professional Standards for Teachers will be developed by the National Council for Teacher Education by 2022 to promote proper teaching. Equitable education access will be ensured through establishment of Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones that will provide facilities to disadvantaged groups and backward regions.⁶

In context to higher education, NEP 2020 has stated that Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will act as the single regulator for higher education excluding legal and medical studies. This move will help in ensuring that all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) conform to the established standards. The policy aims at making HEIs "large, well resourced, vibrant multi-disciplinary institutions". A stage wise mechanism will also be established to grant "graded autonomy" to colleges. In addition, top 200 global universities will be allowed to open campuses in India. An Academic Bank of Credit too will be set up that will keep in account credits earned from different HEIs which can be counted towards final degree. Furthermore, multiple exit options will be provided at different levels with appropriate certification. Keeping in mind the recent pandemic, the policy also mentions a set of recommendations that aim at promoting online education and equipping the Indian education landscape with alternate modes of quality education when in person education is not possible. In addition, National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) will be established to enhance online learning, planning and assessment.⁷

ASSESSMENT OF NEP 2020

NEP 2020 finally brings the required shift to practical skill based learning needed in the Indian education landscape. The policy addresses most of the critical issues of the Indian education system and provides a way for educating and developing the human capital of India. Multiple exit points in education provides an opportunity to people to get into employment at different times, ages and levels.⁸ Flexibility of subjects and removal of separations among streams will benefit those interested in multi-disciplinary courses. Furthermore, emphasis on vocational education will help in developing essential skills in students. Introduction of e-courses will ensure proper education during pandemics and unforeseen events and also make sure that students from backward regions and disadvantaged groups get access to high quality education. The changes that will be made in the board examination system will help in judging students on their learning skills and move the emphasis away from the traditional rote learning.⁹

Moreover, measures taken by the policy to facilitate the entry of premier global universities will not only increase the choices for Indians and save money of several Indian international students but also increase foreign exchange by attracting students of different nationalities. Making the regional / mother / local language the medium of instruction is a right step towards recognizing the multi-lingual diversity of India and promotes to the aim of equitable universal education.¹⁰

However, the aim of NEP 2020 to bring back 2 crore children to school, establish an inclusive and equitable education system by 2030, ensure that every child comes out to school adept in at least one skill, achieve universal foundational learning and numeracy skills by 2025 and universalize ECCE to secondary Education by 2030¹¹ might seem a little ambitious.

⁶<https://www.narendramodi.in/cabinet-approves-national-education-policy-2020-paving-way-for-transformational-reforms-in-school-and-higher-education-systems-in-the-country-550741>

⁷<https://www.narendramodi.in/cabinet-approves-national-education-policy-2020-paving-way-for-transformational-reforms-in-school-and-higher-education-systems-in-the-country-550741>

⁸<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/h SNC-university-welcomes-lauds-the-national-education-policy-2020/articleshow/77264113.cms?from=mdr>

⁹<https://www.financialexpress.com/education-2/national-education-policy-2020-highlights-1-year-pg-4-year-ug-no-more-m-phil-and-more-check-key-points/2038906/#:~:text=Highlights%20of%20New%20Education%20Policy,entry%2Fexit%20in%20the%20system.>

¹⁰https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/educating-india-120073100069_1.html

¹¹National Educational Policy 2020, Major Transformational Reforms in Education Sector

Furthermore, there are several aspects of the NEP 2020 that require close examination. Attention has to be paid to the implications for marginalized groups and constitutional values. The absence of any statements regarding reservation in academic institutions is a little worrisome. Moreover, little attention has been paid to educational institutions in tribal areas known as ashramshalas which are included in the Early Childhood Children Education program. In addition, there is no time frame specified within which Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) will gain access to HEIs. It is also quite difficult to imagine how all the policies and schemes under NEP 2020 will be implemented in the face of growing privatization of the Indian education sector. While NEP 2020 talks about establishing “Departments in Languages, Literature, Music...”, it misses out on several other important fields such as Women’s Studies, Development Studies, Cultural Studies, and Environmental Studies.¹²

Moreover, the Government’s fixation of fee regulation prevents private universities and reputed public universities from charging fees that fund expansion and sustain high quality education. The “light but tight” system of the Indian Government will only be successful if HEIs adopt a liberal approach. Furthermore, there is little incentive for premier global University to open an Indian branch. Policy short sightedness and over regulation in the education sector is a prominent reason behind Indian universities not coming in the top 100 global rankings and also how China today has a tertiary GER of about 60 percent against India’s 26.3 percent despite having been behind India just two decades ago.¹³

II. CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy 2020 is a step in the right direction and provides much hope for the future of education in India. Ensuring “Equity and Inclusion”, “Community Participation”, “Use of Technology” in teaching and learning, fostering “Critical thinking and Creativity”, emphasizing on “Conceptual Understanding”, and recognizing the capability of every student are the key principles of NEP 2020. The goal to make ECCE to Secondary Education universally accessible to all and establish foundational literacy and numeracy among students will help propel India into the 21st century. The transform in the curriculum and pedagogical structure that NEP 2020 focuses on will push India's education system into modern learning. Focus on critical thinking, experiential learning, and interactive classes will emphasize on the overall learning and development of every Indian student. Integration of subjects by breaking boundaries between different streams, emphasizing on technology and digital literacy, promoting multilingual teaching and competency-based education and exams will positively impact the Indian education landscape. Making it mandatory for students to acquire skills in health and nutrition, fitness, sports, wellness and physical education will help imbibe important life skills in children. Educating every student about constitutional values and rights will help produce responsible citizens of future India.

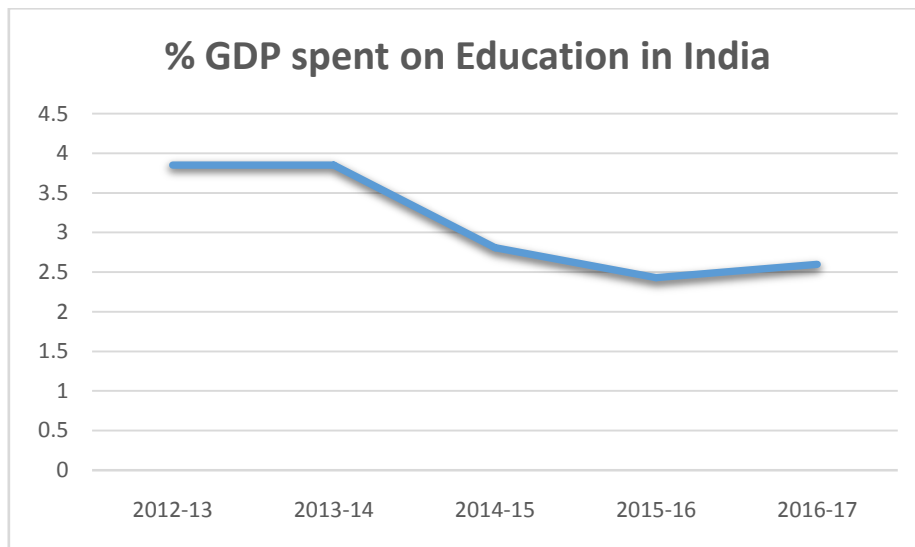
However, there are certain aspects that have to be carefully examined. The three main issues surrounding this policy are multilingualism, vocational education, and early childhood education. While the step to make the regional/ local/mother language as a medium of instruction and encouraging kids to pick up and learn different languages is much appreciated, many are of the view that English has become the global language today and thus students should be encouraged to learn English as early as possible. Furthermore, light needs to be shed upon vocational training. NEP 2020 states that vocational education and training will be given to a child when he reaches Class 6. However, the Child Rights and Law states that a child cannot be put into any vocation till the age of 14.

Moreover, while the move to strengthen early education in India is much needed and appreciated, there is little clarity over the system. Prior to the NEP 2020, students of age groups 3-6 would attend Anganwadis. NEP 2020 has stated that children of the age group 4-8 will attend preschools. Therefore, a proper preschooling arrangement must be established wherein children till the age of 3 are provided food and nutrition by Anganwadis and kids from 4-8 years attend preschools which standalone provide good quality education and nutrition. There also exists a sharp education and knowledge divide today between those who attend private preschools and government ones. Efforts have to be made to make sure good quality education is provided to all.

¹²<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/national-education-policy-reservation-6531546/#:~:text=National%20Education%20Policy%202020%20requires,constitutional%20values%2C%20among%20other%20things.&text=Also%20absent%20is%20any%20mention,%2C%20teachers%2C%20or%20othe%20employees>.

¹³<https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/national-education-policy-2020-tectonic-shift-for-the-better-of-higher-education/2039292/#:~:text=Against%20such%20a%20backdrop%2C%20NEP,tectonic%20shift%20for%20the%20better>.

Another matter of concern is how these reforms will be implemented within the narrow scope of funds. As can be seen in the graph below, the percent of the Indian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on education has been abysmally low. It increased to 4.6% in 2019 but the government's goal of reaching 6% still seems very far away.¹⁴



Source: WB Database

The Indian Government should specify a time frame within which Education spending as a percent of Indian GDP will be raised to 6%. In order to introduce technology and digital learning and make Indian university campuses vibrant and world class, funds are a necessity.

Nevertheless, NEP 2020 comes after 34 long awaited years and hopefully it will mark the rise of the Indian education sector and propel our education system into the twenty first century. While it is quite challenging to implement all reforms, if Indian education sector works in a systematic and united manner, we will be successfully able to surmount all initial challenges and reap the benefits of modern learning and education.

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¹⁴<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/education-spend-rose-to-4-6-of-gdp-target-6-javadekar/articleshow/68245671.cms?from=mdr>