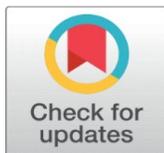
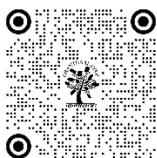


NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 outlines a vision of new education system of India. In this paper an attempt has been made to take an overview of the education system in India. The paper also discusses both sides of the debate on the National Education Policy 2020. The paper is purely theoretical and is on the secondary sources of data.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) highlights certain unique aspects which were missing in the earlier education policies. These unique features include provisions such as wide choice offered to learners, flexibility, vocational education, multiple entry-exits, glorification of ancient Indian culture etc. On the other hand, there are issues like promoting privatisation, undermining the Right to Education Act and most importantly, replacing constitutional values with ideas such as service, non-violence, cleanliness, sacrifice and courtesy. Added to this, there is a great hurry to implement the policy without meaningfully engaging with the concerns raised. NEP 2020 has clearly divided people in two groups- the supporters and the critics. While its supporters focus on the innovative ideas introduced in NEP 2020, it has been criticised on many grounds by those who oppose it. However, it would not be fair to link all problems in education to NEP.

For a long time, almost since independence, India has had a layered system of education where both public and private simultaneously existed. These two types of educational institutions catered to our stratified social fabric, low-cost schools for the economically and socially weaker sections of society and private or international schools for the wealthy class. The Kothari Commission (1964-1966) recommended a common school system, which was hugely appreciated as a novel idea but unfortunately was never implemented. The National Policy of Education, 1986, introduced Non-Formal Education (NFE) for the children belonging to the weaker sections of society but it was accused

of promoting child labour. The Government took initiative and introduced Central Schools (Kendriya Vidyalayas), Navodaya Vidyalayas, and Pratibha Bal Vikas Vidyalayas. However, they further layered the already stratified education system. With the 1986 Education Policy, there was a change in both norms and goals of educational institutions. Achieving learning outcomes became the goal and in order to reach this goal, continuous evaluation became the norm. Micro-managing further victimised the already disempowered teachers and managerial discourse became the new jargon. These deeply contentious issues predate NEP 2020.

2. OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

Modern education, particularly higher education in India had its beginnings during the colonial rule in the mid-19th Century, when Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were set up. However, it is only after independence that a comprehensive and inclusive system of education was introduced. Due to the diverse nature of Indian society (in terms of regional, linguistic, religious, socio-cultural etc.), the education system faced many issues and challenges. Government of India attempted to address those challenges by way of setting up various Education Commissions. The Government has drafted various Education Policies, which have played a major role in development and improvement of the education system in India, on the basis of the recommendations given by each of these commissions. The various Commissions that were set up from time to time and the various education policies drafted by the Government include the following:

- 1) Under the Chairmanship of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the University Education Commissionⁱ set up in 1948. The commission recommended setting up of universities to promote higher education in various regions of India with an aim to make higher education accessible to all sections of society, irrespective of region, religion, caste, class and gender.
- 2) The Secondary Education Commissionⁱⁱ was set up in 1952 under the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar. The commission recommended diversification of high school courses, establishment of multipurpose high schools and technical schools and introduction of a uniform pattern of education throughout India. 11+2+2 was the prevalent system of education, which included 11 years of schooling, matriculation examination at the end of the 11th year, 2 years Inter and 2 years of Bachelor's Degree.
- 3) In 1964, the Indian Education Commissionⁱⁱⁱ was set up under the Chairmanship of D. S. Kothari. It is popularly known as the Kothari Commission. It strongly recommended drastic reconstruction of education system. This reconstruction was to be done in order to realise the constitutional goals and also, to resolve various problems faced by our country in different sectors. Consideration these recommendations, the National Policy on Education was formulated in 1968. The committee recommended three language formula, (Regional language, National Language and English) as a step toward national integration. It also recommended the 10+2+3 system of education, which included 10 years of schooling, matriculation examination at the end of the 10th year, 2 years of Pre-degree (Junior college) and 3 years of Bachelor's Degree education (Senior college).
- 4) The Draft National Policy on Education formulated in 1979, suggested implementation of a good educational system that reinforces the constitutional values. The policy emphasised encouragement of national integration through education.
- 5) The Government of India initiated the National Policy on Education^{iv} in 1986 with an aim to have inclusive education. The focus was on particularly the weaker sections of society, that is, those categories of people who were deprived of educational opportunities for centuries in the past like the SCs STs, OBCs and women. Establishment of open universities was also recommended and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was set up.
- 6) In the post-1991 scenario, after the process of globalisation, education has emerged as a prominent field in the service sector or tertiary sector. Under the chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti, the Government of India set up a commission in 1990 to re-assess the impact of the provisions made by the National Policy on Education (1986) and also to give recommendations. The National Policy on Education (1992) highlighted the need for greater transformation of the Indian educational system, with a focus on quality enhancement. There was also emphasis laid on the promotion, development and strengthening of national integration.
- 7) In 2000-2001, the Education for All Movement, that is, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan^v (SSA) was introduced. It was a central government programme focusing on universalising elementary education with a specific time deadline.

- 8) On 1st April 2010, the Right to Education Act^{vi} (RTE) 2009 or The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was implemented. Under this act, free and compulsory education was to be provided for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Since then, India joined the group of 135 other countries, where education is considered a fundamental right of every child.
- 9) National Policy on Education^{vii}, 2020 is expected to bring profound changes in the education system in India. The policy has a broad framework covering education from elementary to higher education level. It also includes vocational training programmes in both rural and urban areas. As per the NEP 2020, the 10+2 structure is replaced with 5+3+3+4 model, which includes 5 foundational years, from pre-school to class 2, followed by 3 years of preparatory learning from class 3 to class 5, followed by 3 years in the middle stage that is class 6 to class 8, and finally a 4-year secondary stage from class 9 to class 12.

The NEP 2020's higher education policy proposes a 4-year multi-disciplinary bachelor's degree in an undergraduate programme with multiple exit options. These will include professional and vocational areas as follows:

- 1) After completion of 1 year of study - Certificate
- 2) After completion of 2 years of study - Diploma
- 3) After completion of 3 years of study - Bachelor's Degree
- 4) A 4-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's degree

3. DEBATE ON NEP 2020

As mentioned earlier, NEP 2020 has divided people into two groups- supports of NEP and opponents of NEP. The following arguments are made by those who support NEP 2020.

- 1) NEP 2020 recommends the formation of a new governing body, that is, Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). It will act as a single authority in higher education all over India. However, it will exclude legal and medical education. With the formation of HECI, University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and other regulatory bodies which govern all educational institutions will be dismantled. Formation of HECI will ensure rapid progress of educational institutions as the managements can adopt and implement unique programmes and properties of various institutions. This step will also ensure introduction of multidisciplinary system in universities and colleges across the country.
- 2) The NEP 2020 plans to introduce open and distance learning systems. With an emphasis on use of technology (including online mode of education), this initiative will surely be welcome amongst the youth. In presents times, the young students show a keen interest in online courses. Therefore, most of the well- known universities of the world have started providing a number of online courses. Introduction of such Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)^{viii} will definitely help the students from backward areas for whom moving to big cities or foreign countries for higher studies may be a distant dream because of their economic conditions.
- 3) In the contemporary world, especially after the COVID pandemic, virtual learning has become a new normal. But NEP is the first policy to rebuild the school system in the world that is trying to teach Artificial Intelligence (AI)^{ix} from school level (class VI level). This new platform is not a mere teaching-learning method, because it also has an internship, that is, On the Job Training (OJT)^x component.
- 4) Prior to NEP 2020, the UGC has regulated most of the universities of our country. Universities were overregulated and underfunded. India is a land of diversities. These diversities are regional, religious, linguistic, and socio-cultural. Students of various universities and colleges come from different backgrounds. Therefore, common and rigid rules for all, have hindered the development of the educational institutions. NEP 2020 has put forth that in the first phase, the colleges will be granted academic autonomy, which will enable them to introduce new programmes and courses and even draft their own syllabus. Gradually affiliations of colleges will be phased out and graded financial autonomy will be given to them. This is a brilliant step forward, because this decision will boost up the energy of universities to enhance their capacity in their own pace.
- 5) NEP 2020 is very promising policy because it is designed keeping in mind the problems faced by the students. It will allow students to take breaks in their education to discover their interests. NEP 2020 has introduced multiple entry and exit options, which is definitely students centric. Therefore, if a student thinks that he/she is not fit for a course then he/she may leave the course in varied phases either with a certificate or with a diploma.

NEP 2020 has also proposed to establish an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)^{xi} which would digitally store academic credits of each student, earned from various recognized HEIs so that the degree from an HEI can be awarded to a student taking into account the total credits earned by him/ her.

There are others who criticise the NEP 2020 on various grounds as follows:

- 1) Indeed, the New Education Policy looks promising as it has come up with bright ideas to re-structure the education system. However, it must be realised that the policy is starting with the existing imperfect system of education. Mere change in the name of the ministry cannot ensure changes in the strategies adopted by the ministry. The NEP has failed to lay out any clear roadmap for complete makeover of the education system.
- 2) NEP 2020 has emphasised digital education, but how can we forget that National Optical Fiber Network (NOFN)^{xii} is still not completely operational even after 8 years of its implementation. The digitalised education can clearly create a divide amongst people who can access it as against those who cannot access it. There are many unanswered questions. How to train children at home to follow digital education? How the equality will be maintained among the students coming from weaker sections of society, who cannot avail broadband connectivity? How can be the balance maintained among the socio-economically disadvantaged students and comparatively financially more stable students?
- 3) In 1964, the Kothari Commission had recommended a 6% allocation of GDP in education. Unfortunately, since independence, India has never spent 6% of its GDP on education. In the latest education policy, the government has decided to allocate 6% of GDP on education, a step which is better late than never. In 2014-15, government had spent 4.14% GDP on education. Regrettably, in 2020-21 it has reduced to 3.2%. If the government, thus, reduced spending on education in comparatively good times, how can it double in bad times (during and post COVID pandemic)?
- 4) The NEP 2020 has provided a broad guideline which is not mandatory to follow. Since education is a subject of concurrent list, the proposed reforms are can be implemented collaboratively by the Central and State Governments. Even if all State governments accept the policy as it is, private schools are not bound to provide education in regional or local language. There are many imperfections in the policy which will create an inevitable class division among students.
- 5) One of the main drawbacks with the policy is that it does not have a strong implementation plan. It makes bold suggestions for changes but does not offer a detailed plan on how to get there. This uncertainty may cause misunderstandings among educators, students, and educational institutions, leading to inconsistent implementation across the nation. The anticipated benefits of NEP 2020 might not materialize in the absence of a clear plan in place.
- 6) NEP 2020 promotes board exams at all levels, beginning in the early years, and highlights the value of standardized evaluation. This may create increased psychological pressure on students and even lead to unhealthy competition among them. It can cause children to place an undue emphasis on their performance and grades, endangering their general growth and wellbeing.
- 7) There is a great emphasis on multi-disciplinarity in NEP 2020. The multidisciplinary approach has been introduced with a goal of offering a wider choice of disciplines to students. But this can unintentionally reduce the alternatives given to students. With high value placed on vocational education and skill development, subjects like arts, humanities and social sciences may get less focus. This restricted concentration may impede all round development of children as thinkers and artists.
- 8) The training and support needs of teachers are not sufficiently addressed by the NEP 2020. In absence of clearly defined rules for ongoing professional development and incentives, the standard of education delivered in classrooms could be adversely impacted.
- 9) Digital education and e-learning platforms are given a lot of weightage in NEP 2020. This can improve access to education, but it also points to the widening digital gap in our society. Not every student has equal access to the internet, digital devices or resources needed for distance learning. This disparity could aggravate educational inequality by further marginalizing learners from socio-economically weaker sections of society.

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- 10) Standardization of education seems to be the main goal of NEP 2020 is. However, while doing so, there is a threat that the regional and cultural differences may be ignored. The one-size-fits-all approach may not address the particular needs of students from varied backgrounds.

4. CONCLUSION

India has had a glorious history of education. Lord Macaulay arrived with a mission, to wipe India's mind clean and replace it with English memory. He said, *"If we want to enslave India permanently, we must destroy its education system and replace it with English schools."* Thus, while western education was introduced, India's scientific, technical and moral education was largely ignored. In 1931, during the Round Table conference Gandhi ji said, *"The beautiful tree of education was cut down by you British. Therefore, today, India is far more illiterate than it was 100 years ago."*

Since India's independence in 1947, several steps were taken by the successive governments to decolonize our education system. Various agencies and commissions were formed to restructure education, for example, the University Education Commission (1948-49), Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), D. S. Kothari Commission (1964-66) and National Policy on Education (1968) etc. However, there was a serious problem of non-implementation of the suggestions made by each one of these commissions.

NEP 2020 is a powerful instrument to revamp the earlier education system and restructure it completely. But it is a complicated and long-term process. Both the Central and State Governments have to be more responsible to implement the policy from the grass root level. NEP 2020 is a nectar fruit of long consultations and deliberations with all stakeholders including students (learners), teachers (facilitators), educational institutions, managements, industry and society at large and the State/ UT Governments. The policy has received a wide publicity with a positive and overwhelming response from the stakeholders.

NEP 2020 aims to overcome the social hierarchy and divide associated with vocational education. There is an attempt to integrate vocational education programmes into the mainstream education in all educational institutions in a planned way. Restructuring the Indian education system is the goal of NEP 2020. However, while doing so, its advantages and disadvantages need to be assessed carefully. Improving the quality of education across all levels (from primary level to university level) is a continuous and ongoing process. Through a thorough analysis of the benefits and drawbacks, the stakeholders can collaborate to ensure that the new education policy is implemented in a way that best supports everyone's holistic development, inclusion, and equitable chances.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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ⁱ The University Education Commission, also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission, was established in India in 1948 to examine the state of university education and suggest improvements. Chaired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a prominent scholar and former Vice-Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University, the commission submitted its report in August 1949.

ⁱⁱ In 1952 Union Government of India appointed Dr. A Laxman Swami Mudaliar as a chairman of secondary education commission. The aim of this commission was to examine the existing system of secondary education in the country and to suggest measures to improve it. The commission submitted its report in August 1963 on almost all aspects of secondary education. Major recommendations of the commission were- installation of the higher secondary system with diversified courses, three language formula, emphasis on educational and vocational guidance, improvement in the system of examination and improvement in the methods of teaching.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Kothari Commission had given 23 recommendations to revamp the education system in India. The recommendations given by the Kothari Commission are listed below.

- i. Defects in the existing education system
- ii. Aims of the education
- iii. Methods of teaching
- iv. Textbook
- v. Curriculum
- vi. Educational structures and standards.
- vii. Physical welfare of students
- viii. Education of women
- ix. Guidance and counselling
- x. Problems of Supervision and inspection
- xi. Three language formula
- xii. Distance Education
- xiii. Selective Admission
- xiv. Vocational Education
- xv. Education on Morals and Religion

^{iv} The 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) was a landmark initiative aimed at reforming and expanding India's education system. It aimed to address disparities, equalize opportunities, and focus on all-round development, particularly for marginalized groups like women and Scheduled Castes/Tribes. The policy emphasized universal access to quality education, with a focus on early childhood care and education, elementary education, and vocationalization.

^v A few important facts about SSA are mentioned in the list below:

- i. SSA is termed as an 'Education for All' movement
- ii. The pioneer of the SSA programme was Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Indian Former Prime Minister.
- iii. The Central Government in partnership with State Governments is implementing this initiative.
- iv. The initial aim of SSA was to meet its objectives by 2010, however, the timeline has been extended.
- v. SSA aims to provide educational infrastructure to around 193 million children in 1.1 million habitations.
- vi. 86th Amendment Act to the Indian Constitution provided legal backing to SSA when it made education free and compulsory for children in the age group of 6-14.

^{vi} The main highlights of the RTE are as follows:

- i. Free and compulsory education for all children in the age group 6 to 14.
- ii. There will not be any detention or examination until elementary education is completed. However, there has been an amendment to this (as mentioned above in the criticisms of the Act).
- iii. This makes providing education a legal obligation of the governments.
- iv. It also makes it mandatory for all private schools to reserve 25% of their seats for the EWS and disadvantaged groups.

^{vii} 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: Quality, Affordability, Equity, Access and 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:

- i. Increasing public investment in education
- ii. Setting up NEC (National Education Commission)
- iii. Increasing focus on vocational and adult education
- iv. Strengthening the use of technology, etc.

^{viii} Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are [free online courses](#) available for anyone to enrol. MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills, advance your career and deliver quality educational experiences at scale. Millions of people around the world use MOOCs to learn for a variety of reasons, including: career development, changing careers, college preparations, supplemental learning, lifelong learning, corporate eLearning & training, and more.

^{ix} Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a technology that enables machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving and decision-making. It encompasses a wide range of technologies, including machine learning, deep learning and natural language processing (NLP). AI aims to simulate human intelligence and cognitive capabilities, allowing machines to understand and respond to human language, analyse data and make recommendations.

^x OJT stands for On-the-Job Training. It's a method of learning and skill development that takes place directly in a workplace setting, providing hands-on experience and guidance from experienced trainers or coworkers.

^{xi} Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) is a virtual/ digital storehouse that contains the information of the credits earned by individual students throughout their learning journey. It will enable students to open their accounts and give multiple options for entering and leaving colleges or universities.

^{xii} The National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN), now known as BharatNet, is a large-scale initiative in India aimed at providing broadband connectivity to rural areas by connecting all 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats with optical fibre. It is designed to be a "middle-mile" infrastructure, connecting Block Headquarters (BHQs) to Gram Panchayats (GPs) using existing fibre infrastructure and adding new fibre where needed.