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Transforming Education in India: An Appraisal of Key Focus Areas in the National Education Policy 2020

Supriya Khan

Former Student, Department of Education, Visva-Bharati, West Bengal, India

Subrata Khan

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Jadavpur University, West Bengal, India

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative framework aimed at revamping India's educational landscape to meet global standards and address national priorities. This study examines NEP 2020 with a focus on four core objectives: understanding its proposed changes to the existing education system, identifying the key priorities and areas of emphasis within the policy, exploring the innovative approaches it introduces, and analyzing potential challenges in its implementation. Through an extensive review of policy documents, the study elucidates NEP 2020's commitment to inclusivity, critical thinking, and flexibility, highlighting its significant reforms in curriculum design, teacher training, and technology integration. Furthermore, the study presents critical insights into the anticipated obstacles that may hinder the policy's successful adoption, including infrastructural, administrative, and financial challenges. This appraisal contributes to ongoing discussions on the policy's impact and offers innovative global standard ideas to enhance educational quality and address future challenges in the Indian education system.

Keywords: NEP-2020; NEP-2020 VS NEP-1986; Educational Reform; Innovative Approaches; Implementation Challenges.

Introduction: Education is fundamental for human development as well as society and nation. A good education system will bring national economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific progress, National integration, and cultural Preservation (Ministry of

Education, 2020). Universal high-quality education is the best way to develop and maximise our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual, society, the country, and the world (Xavier & Thankachan, 2023). India has the largest population of young people in the world, and our responsibility for providing high-quality education opportunities determines the future of our country. The world is constantly changing, even with scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and the spread of artificial intelligence (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). The needs of mankind have changed with the change of era. Drastic changes have also happened in the educational field in the past 34 years, and the policies framed should be modified according to the needs of the people and the nation. A strong foundation should be laid in education, and only then will it produce an all-around development for future generations. In this context, the education sector needs to drive itself towards the needs and demands of the 21st century. After 34 years, the third National Education Policy was released on 29.07.2020 by K. Kasturirangan.

The National Education Policy (NEP)–2020 emphasises holistic and multidisciplinary education to provide 21st-century skills to learners. NEP–2020 states that such 'education would be aimed at developing all capacities of human beings – intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner' (NEP, 2020). The Policy emphasises the importance of multidisciplinary education through both disciplinary and professional programs for developing competencies of critical thinking, adaptability, and self-management among learners. The NEP-2020 aims to transform India into a knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making school and college education more holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary, suited to 21st-century needs, and aimed at bringing out each student's unique capabilities (Padmambika et al., 2024; Tayade, 2024; Patil, 2024; Umachagi & Selvi, 2022).

After independence, the Indian education system was heavily influenced by Western education culture (Aalam & Selvan, 2022). Naturally, the Indian Education system diverted from the mainstream of the Indian philosophy of education. Now, the new NEP-2020 has tried to imbibe Indian education culture into it. The Researcher intends to check the applicability, loopholes, and positive points of NEP 2020.

Objectives of the Study: Based on the research paper titled "Transforming Education in India: An Appraisal of Key Focus Areas in the National Education Policy 2020," the researcher follows the following research objectives;

- 1) To identify how the new Education Policy 2020 is proposing to bring changes to the existing education system.
- 2) To identify the points on which the policy has been given more importance.
- 3) To appreciate the innovative ideas introduced by the National Education Policy 2020.
- 4) To identify the challenges that can arise from the implementation of the policy.

Methodology of the Study:

Method: Considering the demands and nature of the present study, the present study includes a content analysis research method.

Population: Various documents, articles, books, and NEP 1968, NEP 1986, NEP 1992, and NEP 2020 guidelines used only non-human material information.

Sample: Non-human sources are in the form of documents in the NEP 2020 guidelines.

Data analysis: Collected data is analysed using the appropriate documents.

Methodological Diagram:

Research Questions	Objectives	Nature Of The Data	Tool Technique	Sampling Procedure
How will the new education policy in 2020 change the existing education system?	To identify how the new Education Policy 2020 is proposing to bring changes in the Existing education system.	Qualitative	Content Analysis	Convenient Sampling
In which aspects has the policy been given more importance?	To identify the points on which the policy has been given more importance.	Qualitative	Content Analysis	Convenient Sampling
What new things can be considered innovative ideas introduced by the new education policy in 2020?	To appreciate the innovative ideas introduced by the National Education Policy 2020.	Qualitative	Content Analysis	Convenient Sampling
What are the challenges that can arise from the implementation of the 2020 Education Policy?	To identify the challenges that can arise by the implementation of the Policy.	Qualitative	Content Analysis	

Objective 1: To identify how the new Education Policy 2020 is proposing to bring changes in the Existing education system.

NEP-2020, which will replace the National Policy on Education-1986. Many changes have been introduced in comparison to the existing education policy.

NEP 2020	NEP 1986
NEP 2020 was promulgated by the government of India by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and The Ministry of Education (MOE) of India is responsible for implementing the National Education Policy 2020.	NEP 1986 was promulgated by the government of India under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD) is responsible for implementing the 1986 national education policy.
A common education structure of NEP-2020 5+3+3+4+4+1 is suggested.	The common education structure of NEP (1986) 10 (5+3+2) +2+3+2 is followed.
The main vision of the NEP-2020 envisions an Indian-centric education system that, by providing high-quality education to all, contributes directly to transforming our nation's sustainability into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society.	The NEP-1986 promoted minority education, equality for women, and education of SC, ST, and backward sections. More emphasis was placed on equal educational opportunities and education for all sections of society.
The foundational principles of NEP 2020 are access equality, quality, affordability, and accountability. The policy believes that our education system should develop good human beings with rational thinking, compassion, empathy, courage, resilience, scientific temper, creative imagination, and ethical values.	The national education policy of 1986 envisages piloting India into the 21st century, which will be the century of science and technology, electronics, telecommunication, computer technology, and space science, with the help of a modernised and recognised education system.
5 + 3 +3+4 education system will be followed. 3-8-year-old children fall under the foundational stage, 8- 11-year-old children fall under the preparatory stage, 11-14-year-old children under the middle stage and 14-18-year-old children under the secondary stage.	The 10+2+3 Education system follows a 10-year cycle divided into five years of primary education, three years of upper primary education, and two years of lower secondary Education.
Before class 1 (before age 5), every child will be moved to a 'preparatory' class or 'Bal Vatika' carried by an ECCE-qualified teacher. Students will take no exam up to the second standard.	Exams can be taken students from the first standard.

NEP 2020 recommended formulating a national curricular or pedagogical framework for early childhood care and education. NCERT developed this framework in two parts: a sub-framework for 0-3-year-old children and a sub-framework for 3-8-year-old children.	It is not mandatory in the National Education Policy 1986 format.
A 10-day bag-less period will be encouraged, during which students will intern with local vocational experts such as carpenters, gardeners, artists, etc.	It is not mandatory in the National Education Policy 1986 format.
There is no rigid separation between the arts, science, and commerce. Students have the freedom to choose any subject from any stream and create their own subject combination.	There is a rigid separation between the arts, science, and commerce. Students are not free to choose a subject from another stream.
Board exams will be made easier and also descriptive and objective. Board exams are conducted twice a year.	Board exams are conducted once a year and will be made harder, as well as descriptive and subjective.
In NEP 2020, it was recommended that the National Testing Agency (NTA) conduct a common entrance exam to screen candidates for admission to higher education institutes.	All undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) admissions are based on the entrance exam scores conducted at the college or state level, except for NIT and medical colleges.
According to this policy, the UG degree will have multiple exit and entry options of 3-4 years. During this duration, students get a certificate after completing one year, a diploma after two years, a bachelor's degree after three years and four years of multi-disciplinary bachelor's program.	The NEP-1986 system does not have multiple exit and entry systems and also does not store credit for higher studies.
Two-year master's courses for those candidates who have completed a three-year bachelor's degree and candidates who have completed a four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's programme are given one year, and these system research options are also given.	After graduating with a master's degree of 2 years with a specialisation focus.

The M.Phil. programme shall be discontinued because students are exposed to preliminary research in their undergraduate and postgraduate courses.	A one-year research degree leading to an M.Phil. in any subject is offered to provide preliminary research experience.
NET/SLET qualifications are not sufficient to become an assistant professor. Ph.D. is compulsory for it.	NET/SLET qualified is enough to become an assistant professor.
The affiliation of colleges will be phased out in 15 years, and a stage-wise mechanism will be established for granting greater autonomy to colleges.	Most of the colleges in HEI are under the state universities, and those colleges have no autonomy in curriculum and evaluation.
In the higher education system, the expected pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is 30:1. Areas with many socio-economically disadvantaged students will aim for a (PTR) of under 25:1.	The expected people-teacher ratio (PTR) is 20:1 in the higher education system.
Faculty members in higher education institutions will give students the freedom to design their own curriculum and pedagogical approaches, guiding them to become innovative and creative thinkers.	In higher education institutions, faculty members are considered facilitators of educating students to make them component.
The four-year integrated B.ED. offered by such multidisciplinary higher education institutions will become the minimum degree qualification for school teachers by 2030.	After completing graduation, a two-year B.ED programme must be completed to become a school teacher.
Suggested improved online library memberships, including online journals and books.	Suggested for the improved physical library facility, including books and journals.
One hundred top-ranked foreign universities worldwide will be allowed to inspire Indian universities.	Foreign universities are not allowed to have direct placements in India.

Objective 2: To identify the points on which the policy has been given more importance.

Foundational stage:

- 1) NEP 2020 has given the highest priority to building a strong foundation early in a child's life.

- 2) The foundational stage can be divided into two parts: three years of preschool (nursery, KG, and upper KG) and two years of primary (classes I and II).
- 3) The foundation stage consists of flexible, multifaceted, multilevel, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning.
- 4) Early childhood care and education aims to achieve optimal outcomes in physical and motor development, cognitive development, social-emotional and ethical development, cultural-artistic development, and language development.
- 5) Students will be taught in their mother tongue or regional language at this stage. Whether this will extend to private schools remains to be seen.
- 6) NCERT developed a national curricular and pedagogical framework for early childhood care and education (ECCE). This Framework is divided into two parts: 0- 3 years and 3- 8 years.
- 7) ECEC teaches the children the alphabet, languages, numbers, counting colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles, logical thinking, problem solving, drawing, painting, visual art, craft, drama, pottery, music, and movement.

Preparatory stage:

- 1) Children between the age group of 8 years to 11 years will be part of the preparatory learning.
- 2) Three years of the preparatory stage consists of building on the play, Discovery-based, and activity-based learning.
- 3) In this stage, students will be introduced to varied subjects such as sciences, mathematics, arts, social sciences, and Humanities.
- 4) In the preparatory stage, most emphasis is on groundwork across subjects.
- 5) In this stage, the mother tongue will be the medium of instruction for the 5th grade.
- 6) In this stage, first-time exams will be conducted for students.

Middle stage:

- 1) Three years of middle school education focus on more abstract concepts in each subject, such as science, mathematics, social science, and the Humanities.
- 2) The middle stage will comprise experiential learning, the method adopted in specialised subjects with the subject teacher.
- 3) In this stage, a semester-wise examination system will be conducted for students.
- 4) Introducing coding from the 6th standard. So, it's helping the youth and leading the way to a new world of innovation and creativity, thus allowing children to set their own goals.
- 5) A 10-day bag-less period, sometime during grades 6-8, to intern with local vocational experts such as carpenters, gardeners, potters, artists, etc., is being allowed.
- 6) In this stage, students will be taught three languages. There are States, regions, and, of course, the students themselves.

Secondary stage:

- 1) At this stage, a 4-year study period will be included: 9th standard, 10th standard, 11th standard, and 12th standard.
- 2) This stage will build on the subject-oriented pedagogical and curriculum style with greater depth, flexibility, critical thinking, and attention to life aspirations.
- 3) Students are free to choose subjects outside and across their area of study. Ex: Students have the opportunity to study Humanities with science subjects.
- 4) A semester-wise exam system will be conducted twice a year at this stage.
- 5) Board exams for classes 10 and 12 would be easier, and students would be allowed to appear twice a Year.

Higher education:

- 1) NEP 2020 recommended that the National Testing Agency (NTA) conduct a common entrance exam for universities nationwide.
- 2) NEP 2020 recommended that the undergraduate (UG) program be a four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's program with multiple exit or entry options.
- 3) An Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) will be established to digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognized higher educational institutes so that the credits earned in the previous years can be awarded after entering into the program again. With this ABC, the fear of wastage of years of avoidance.
- 4) Every college will be automated in the next 15 years and also degree-granting.
- 5) NEP 2020 also offers local or Indian languages as a medium of instruction in higher education programs.
- 6) The master's degree program will be one or two years long, and research options are also given at this stage.

Research stage:

- 1) NET and SET qualifications are not sufficient to become an assistant professor.
- 2) PhD degree is a must to become an assistant professor.
- 3) During their PhD, students should undergo and credit coursework in teaching/ education/ pedagogy related to their chosen PhD subject.
- 4) M.Phil. program shall be discontinued because students are exposed to preliminary research in their UG and PG courses.
- 5) To set up the National Research Foundation (NRF) as an autonomous body for funding, mentoring, and building quality research in India.
- 6) NRF will distribute the fund equally at undergraduate, master's, and PhD levels.

Teacher Education:

- 1) For every teacher, knowledge of the local language is mandatory.
- 2) NEP (2020) recommended that teacher vacancies be filled as soon as possible, especially in disadvantaged and large pupil areas.
- 3) Shorter local teacher education programmes will be available at the Block Institute of Teacher Education (BITEs). District Institute for Education and Training (DIETs) or school complexes are used to promote local professions, professional knowledge, and skills.

- 4) In this new policy, the hiring of part-time teachers will eventually be phased out.
- 5) School teachers must undergo 50 hours of CPD opportunities annually to keep themselves by attending workshops or online teacher development modules.
- 6) School principals must undergo CPD in modules related to leadership. School management and implementing competency-based learning.
- 7) NEP 2020 gives teachers autonomy in selecting appropriate pedagogy and encourages them to ensure their students' social-emotional learning, which is a critical aspect of holistic development.

Close collaboration is recommended among schools within a school complex. It will reduce teacher isolation experienced by teachers working in smaller schools and create vibrant teacher communities that work collaboratively to share their best teaching practices.

Objective 3: Identify the innovative ideas introduced by the National Education Policy 2020:

- Extend the right-to-education eligibility window from 6-14 years to 3-18 years.
- The policy pouches for universalising ECCE, with a goal of having 100 percent of children 'school-ready' by 2030.
- Students should not take exams at the foundation stage. This stage mainly focuses on physical and motor development, cognitive development, social-emotional and ethical development, cultural/ artistic development, communication development, early language literacy, and numeracy.
- From 6 standards, students will be taught coding.
- In the middle stage, students will participate in a 10-day bagless period during which they intern with local vocational experts, such as carpenters, gardeners, potters, artists, etc.
- The NCERT and NCTE will develop guidelines for the education of gifted children and a B.Ed. Programmes may also allow a specialisation in this field.
- All curriculum and pedagogy, from the foundational stage onwards, will be basically focused on Indian values (such as seva, achima, Satya, niskam, karma, shanti, etc.) and Indian own education system (such as yoga, medicine, agriculture, engineering, linguistics, games, etc.).
- Every teacher is required to engage in a minimum of 50 hours of Continuing Professional Development annually, driven by their own interests.
- School principals are required to engage in a minimum of 50 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) annually, concentrating on leadership and management, particularly in the preparation and execution of pedagogical programs grounded in competency-based teaching.
- Teacher education will gradually be moved into multi-disciplinary colleges and universities by 2030.
- The NCFTE will thereafter be revised once every 5-10 years to reflect changes in revised NCFs and emerging needs in teacher education.

- Teacher vacancies will be filled as soon as possible, in a time-bound manner, especially in disadvantaged areas and areas with a high pupil-to-teacher ratio or high illiteracy rate.
- Teachers will no longer be engaged in work that is not directly related to teaching. Ex – voting.
- Private higher educational institutions (HEIs) will be subject to a ‘progressive regime of fee determination, which will empower them to set fees for their programmes.
- No exam will be held every year; school students will sit only for exams in classes 3, 5, and 8.
- E-courses will be prepared in regional languages, virtual laboratories will be established, and a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) will be instituted.
- Respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curricula, pedagogy and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject.
- NCERT will design a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to eight years of age.
- Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardised across the country, and national and state curriculum materials will be developed for use by students with hearing impairment.
- Every state and district will be encouraged to establish a ‘Bal Bhavans’ as a special daytime boarding school to participate in art-related, career-related and play-related activities.
- High-quality textbooks, including science textbooks, will be available in mother tongues.
- DIKSHA is an e-learning portal for sharing knowledge and enabling smooth and hassle-free interaction between students and teachers.
- A National assessment centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), will be established as a standard-setting body for setting norms and guidelines for student assessment and evaluation for all recognised school boards.
- The National Testing Agency (NTA) will offer a high-quality common aptitude test and specialised common subject exams in the sciences and Humanities, languages, arts, and vocational subjects at least twice every year for university entrance exams.
- Report cards are to be reviewed by teachers, peers, and students.
- This policy places more emphasis on abstract concepts, life skills, creativity, critical thinking, etc.
- The board exams for classes 10 and 12 will continue, and board exams will be made easier.
- Promoting multilingualism and the significance of language in teaching and learning.
- The aim of the higher education system, including vocational education, is to increase the gross enrolment ratio from 26.3 % to 50% by 2035.
- By 2040, all higher education institutions (HEIs) are expected to evolve into multidisciplinary institutions, each accommodating 3,000 or more students.

- By 2030, there will be a minimum of one large multidisciplinary higher education institution in or near each district.
- The NCTE will develop a common guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) by 2022.
- NCTE will be restructured as a Professional standard-setting body (PSSB) under the General Education Council (GEC).
- The new national education policy wants to make the 4-year UG courses of the bachelor's degree multidisciplinary by allowing students to choose whether they want 1-year, 2-year, 3-year, or 4-year courses.
- Students can get a certificate after a one-year programme, an advanced diploma after two years, a bachelor's degree after three years, and a bachelor's with research after four years.
- This 4-year undergraduate degree option will be the most preferred since it allows students to focus on their chosen minors and major and also allows the chance to shift into a different course without losing the year if they choose.

NEP (2020) states that all fees set by private higher education institutions will be transparently and fully disclosed, and there shall be no arbitrary increases.

Objective 4: Identifying Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents several ambitious goals but also faces significant challenges in its implementation:

- 1) **Opening New Universities:** Doubling the Gross Enrollment Ratio by 2035 requires opening a new university every week, which is a formidable task due to the scale and resources needed.
- 2) **Reforming the School System:** Bringing 20 million children back into schools requires opening 50 new schools per week and hiring hundreds of teachers and headmasters, adding strain to an already stretched education system.
- 3) **Funding Issues:** Despite the policy's goal of allocating 6% of GDP to education, previous governments have failed to meet this target, which remains a major challenge.
- 4) **Coding and Language Proficiency:** The introduction of coding in schools presents hurdles for students who lack proficiency in English, which is essential for developing coding skills.
- 5) **Curriculum Restructuring:** Shifting to a 5+3+3+4 structure and emphasising 21st-century skills require extensive overhauls in curriculum and pedagogy, which is a complex process.
- 6) **Teacher Availability:** NEP 2020 suggests that over 250 million students will enrol in K-12 schools in India by 2030. This means that India needs nearly 7 million more teachers to handle this burgeoning student population. Low teacher salaries and inadequate training are challenges to delivering quality education under NEP 2020.

- 7) **Technological Aids:** Leveraging technology for education is crucial, but many schools lack the necessary infrastructure, and the cost of building digital classrooms is prohibitive.
- 8) **Language Barriers:** Introducing mother tongues as mediums of instruction may widen the gap between students in public and private schools, especially regarding English proficiency.
- 9) **Vocational Education:** Integrating vocational training into mainstream education faces resistance due to social stigma. Many students may prioritise earning money over education, leading to higher dropout rates.
- 10) **Subject Selection Flexibility:** Increased flexibility in subject selection across streams needs to align with university admission processes. Additionally, science subjects are interdependent, complicating this flexibility.
- 11) **Learning vs. Certification:** The multiple exit points in higher education may lead students to prioritise short-term diplomas over more extended degrees, which could affect the perceived value of education and job prospects.

These challenges highlight the complexity and scale of NEP 2020's implementation, which requires careful planning, resource allocation, and systemic changes.

Conclusion: The National Education Policy 2020 anticipates a complete renovation of the school and higher education system. NEP 2020 is designed to transform the Indian education system to meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century. Implementing a new education policy in the Indian educational system will make a drastic change and provide a high-quality education to all. Then, it will also produce an all-around development for the nation's future citizens. The final word to conclude is that it will take time for its final shape and implementation. The implementation and execution of the plans at the ground level will yield the actual results. Just wait and watch the outcomes of the NEP.

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