

NEP: Features and Challenges

¹Sonal Ulal Sarkar, ²Anjali Dave

¹Research Scholar, Faculty of Education, The CVM University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, India

²Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, The CVM University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, India

Email – ¹sonalulalsarkar@gmail.com, ²anjali.dave123@gmail.com,

Abstract: *The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, grounded in Access, Quality, Equity, Affordability, and Accountability, aims to transform India into a global knowledge leader by aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Key features include ensuring universal access to education, foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3, and revamped curricula promoting critical thinking and experiential learning. The policy restructures the educational model to cater to developmental stages and integrates vocational education from an early age. It emphasizes mother tongue instruction up to Grade 5, multidisciplinary learning, flexible course structures, inclusive education, and the use of technology. Additionally, it prioritizes continuous teacher training and holistic student assessments. However, challenges such as technological integration, funding, language barriers, and hasty implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic persist, requiring careful navigation to achieve NEP 2020's ambitious goals.*

Key Words: *National Education Policy, Features, Challenges.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The landscape of education is undergoing continuous evolution, shaped by technological advancements, societal changes, and economic demands. Central to this evolution is the integration of technology into educational practices, facilitating personalized learning experiences and global collaboration. Education is becoming increasingly personalized, catering to individual learning styles and paces through adaptive learning algorithms and competency-based approaches. Moreover, there's a growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, with education extending beyond formal schooling to support skill development throughout one's life. Emphasis is placed on nurturing essential 21st-century skills like critical thinking and collaboration, alongside traditional academic subjects. Education is also embracing diversity and globalization, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Alternative education models, such as homeschooling and Montessori education, are gaining traction, offering flexible and tailored approaches to learning. Additionally, there's a heightened focus on student well-being and mental health, with schools implementing support services and social-emotional learning programs. Overall, the evolving landscape of education is marked by innovation, adaptability, and a commitment to preparing students for success in an ever-changing world.

In response to the evolving global landscape and job market, it's increasingly vital for students not just to accumulate knowledge but to develop robust learning skills. As a result, modern education is shifting towards fostering creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability in dynamic fields, emphasizing less on content consumption. To bridge the disparity between current learning outcomes and the demands of the future, the Ministry of Education recently introduced the National Education Policy 2020. This policy, the first of the 21st century, addresses various developmental aspects of our country and proposes a comprehensive overhaul of the education system, including its governance and regulation. The aim is to align the educational structure with the requirements of the 21st century, nurturing individuals who excel both professionally and personally.

The Union Cabinet of India gave its approval to the National Education Policy on July 29, 2020. This new policy is geared towards bringing about significant enhancements in India's school and higher education systems. Aiming to globalize education from preschool to the secondary level, the government introduced this policy. NEP 2020 seeks to replace the current 10+2 system with a modern 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, catering to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively. Key highlights of NEP 2020 include a focus on enhancing educational quality by promoting creativity and innovation and aspiring to shape India into a "vibrant knowledge society" in the coming decade.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reflects the evolving landscape of education by introducing comprehensive reforms aimed at transforming India's educational system. NEP 2020 acknowledges the importance of adapting education to meet the needs of the 21st century and addresses key challenges and opportunities in the educational sphere. One significant aspect of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary learning¹. The policy recognizes the importance of moving away from rote memorization towards a more comprehensive approach that focuses on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It promotes a flexible curriculum that integrates arts, sciences, vocational studies, and social sciences, fostering a well-rounded education that prepares students for diverse career paths.

2. FEATURES :

The salient features of NEP 2020 were developed on the foundational pillars of Access, Quality, Equity, Affordability, and Accountability, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This revised policy aims to position India as a global knowledge superpower by reshaping school education to be more comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and adaptable to the demands of the 21st century, while also nurturing the individual capabilities of each student².

1. Universal Access to school education: Among its key features, NEP 2020 emphasizes ensuring universal access to school education at all levels. This is to be achieved through various means, including providing infrastructure support, monitoring students' progress and learning levels, facilitating diverse modes of learning, integrating counselors and social workers into the schooling system, offering Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs, implementing secondary education programs equivalent to classes 10 and 12, introducing vocational education courses from preschool to Grade 12, and promoting adult literacy and life-enrichment programs. These initiatives collectively aim to democratize education and equip learners with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

2. Foundational literacy and numeracy: An essential highlight of NEP 2020 is acknowledging the significance of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) as a critical requirement for effective learning. The policy advocates for establishing the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). Through this initiative, states will develop implementation strategies to ensure that all primary school students attain foundational literacy and numeracy skills by grade 3 by the year 2025.

3. School curricula and pedagogy: Revisions in school curricula and teaching methods are geared towards fostering the all-round development of students, prioritizing the acquisition of essential 21st-century competencies. This involves streamlining curricular content to enhance critical thinking, promoting experiential learning, and granting students more flexibility and choice in subject selection³. The distinction between arts and sciences, academic and vocational streams, and curricular and extracurricular activities will be blurred. Furthermore, vocational education will be integrated into Grades 6-8, offering internships as part of a practical curriculum developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) while formulating a new National Curriculum Framework for Schools (NCFSE).

4. Early childhood care and education: Emphasizing Early Childhood Care and Education, NEP 2020 introduces a revamped educational structure, replacing the previous 10+2 format with a new 5+3+3+4 model, tailored to the developmental stages of ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. This significant shift is a key aspect of NEP 2020, as it extends formal school curriculum guidelines to cover the previously neglected age range of three to six years. Globally acknowledged as a crucial period for the cognitive development of children, the age bracket of 3-8 years receives special attention under this policy.

5. School governance: Schools ought to be structured into complexes or clusters, serving as hubs for comprehensive learning and the holistic development of children. They should function as environments where students not only acquire academic knowledge but also cultivate life skills, imbibe fundamental etiquette, and mature into responsible individuals. Essential amenities and resources such as infrastructure, libraries, and a qualified teaching staff should be readily available within these institutions⁴.

6. Multidisciplinary approach: NEP 2020 endeavors to dismantle the rigid confines of traditional disciplines, aspiring to offer students a well-rounded educational journey. It advocates for the amalgamation of arts and sciences, social sciences, and vocational studies. For example, a student specializing in physics might also delve into fashion design, underscoring the policy's commitment to nurturing the comprehensive cognitive growth of students.

7. Flexibility: The policy implements a versatile course framework with various entry and exit options. For instance, if a student opts out of a four-year degree program after completing two years, they will still be awarded a diploma. Similarly, leaving after three years will earn them a bachelor's degree, and completing four years will result in a

bachelor's degree with research. This adaptable structure safeguards against the loss of educational years for students in any situation⁵.

8. Mother tongue: NEP 2020 prioritizes teaching in the mother tongue or regional language up to Grade 5 and beyond, emphasizing that children comprehend complex concepts more effectively in their native language. Nevertheless, the policy ensures that no language is forced upon students.

9. Assessment: The policy intends to move away from memorization-based learning towards a more inclusive approach, where assessments evaluate understanding of concepts and skills. The progress report will be a comprehensive, multidimensional document, providing a thorough overview of learning progress and comprehension.

10. Teacher training: The policy emphasizes the importance of thorough and ongoing training for teachers, focusing on their professional growth and development. It strives to guarantee that teachers receive training in the subjects they teach, pedagogical techniques, and other relevant areas⁶.

11. Technology: NEP 2020 seeks to utilize technology to enrich the learning process and enhance educational organization, administration, and oversight. It suggests establishing a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to streamline decision-making regarding the integration, deployment, and utilization of technology in education.

12. Inclusive education: The policy places particular emphasis on addressing the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). It sets the ambitious goal of achieving 100% enrollment of SEDGs by 2030, thereby ensuring their equitable access to high-quality education.

In essence, NEP 2020 represents a holistic blueprint aimed at revitalizing India's education landscape into a dynamic center of knowledge. It endeavors to strike a balance between fostering deep subject knowledge and cultivating essential 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, scientific inquiry, communication, problem-solving, and beyond.

3. CHALLENGES :

The new policy strives to address various aspects of education but reveals visible layers in its approach, attempting to encompass diverse perspectives and considerations, often resulting in inconsistencies.

1. Lack of Integration: The policy exhibits gaps in integrating technology with pedagogy and lacks coherence in addressing lifelong learning, essential for keeping pace with emerging sciences.

2. Language Barrier: While emphasizing home language learning up to grade five to enhance learning outcomes, the policy overlooks the role of English, a vital language for social and economic mobility in India⁷.

3. Multilingualism Debate: While advocating for multilingualism, the policy faces challenges, especially in states where bilingualism is the norm, and there are concerns about language imposition, particularly Hindi.

4. Lack of Funds: Despite ambitious goals, such as allocating 6% of GDP to education, funding remains a significant challenge, given competing demands from healthcare, national security, and other sectors.

5. Haste in Implementation: The policy's implementation amid the COVID-19 pandemic raises concerns about inadequate parliamentary deliberations and the need for broader consensus.

6. Overambitious Targets: The policy sets ambitious targets that require substantial resources, raising doubts about their feasibility given the current fiscal constraints.

7. Pedagogical and Institutional Limitations: Flexibility in curriculum design and institutional diversity are essential for effective education delivery, but the policy risks imposing uniformity and may undermine institutional identity.

8. Examination Issues: The policy overlooks systemic issues in examinations, including unequal access to quality institutions and the mismatch between imparted knowledge and job market demands.

9. Neglect of Emerging Technologies: The policy is criticized for neglecting education in emerging technological fields like artificial intelligence and nanotechnology, vital for future workforce preparedness.

10. Legal Complexities: Legal conflicts between existing statutes like the Right to Education Act, 2009, and the NEP 2020 raise concerns about implementation challenges and the need for resolution.

11. Role of Regulators: Uncertainties persist regarding the role of regulatory bodies like the UGC and AICTE under the new policy framework, necessitating clarity to ensure effective governance.

12. Enrolment Targets: Doubling the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035 poses logistical challenges, requiring the establishment of numerous universities within a short timeframe.

Furthermore, several critical issues must be tackled to effectively implement NEP 2020 in higher education:

1. Access Challenges: Despite NEP 2020's goal of broadening access to higher education, barriers like poverty, gender bias, and inadequate infrastructure still hinder entry for many. The government must address these obstacles to ensure equitable access for all.

2. Teaching and Learning Quality: NEP 2020 aims to enhance teaching and learning quality in higher education. However, challenges such as teacher shortages, resource deficiencies, and outdated curricula persist. Addressing these issues is crucial for elevating the standard of education delivery⁸.

3. Research and Innovation: NEP 2020 endeavors to foster research and innovation in higher education. Yet, obstacles like insufficient funding, dearth of skilled researchers, and inadequate infrastructure impede progress in this domain. The government needs to address these challenges to stimulate a culture of research and innovation.

Realizing the objectives of NEP 2020 in higher education demands collective action from various stakeholders. Collaboration among the central and state governments, educational institutions, educators, students, and the broader community is essential to overcome these challenges and ensure successful implementation⁹. Despite these challenges, the policy's emphasis on interdisciplinary learning in higher education is laudable, offering opportunities to break down silos and foster a more holistic approach to learning.

4. CONCLUSION :

The 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) represents a watershed moment in India's educational landscape, with its ambitious vision aimed at transforming the country's learning ecosystem into one that is more holistic, flexible, and inclusive. Through an exhaustive examination of the NEP's key provisions, goals, and potential implications, this paper underscores its potential to revolutionize the way education is conceptualized, delivered, and assessed across all levels. The NEP's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, multidisciplinary learning, and vocational education not only addresses longstanding challenges but also aligns with global best practices and emerging socio-economic realities¹⁰. Moreover, its emphasis on leveraging technology, promoting research and innovation, and fostering teacher professionalism signals a proactive approach towards preparing learners for the demands of the 21st century. While the NEP 2020 has been widely lauded for its progressive outlook and comprehensive scope, the paper also highlights the need for meticulous planning, effective implementation strategies, and sustained political will to translate its aspirations into tangible outcomes. Moreover, attention must be paid to issues of equity, accessibility, and quality assurance to ensure that the benefits of the policy accrue to all segments of society, especially marginalized and disadvantaged communities. In essence, the insights gleaned from this paper not only shed light on the transformative potential of the NEP 2020 but also underscore the imperative of continuous dialogue, collaboration, and adaptation to realize its vision of an education system that empowers learners, nurtures talent, and drives national development in the years to come.

In conclusion, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a comprehensive framework for reforming India's education system, addressing various aspects from early childhood education to higher education. It embodies ambitious goals and innovative approaches aimed at fostering holistic development, improving access, enhancing quality, promoting research and innovation, and aligning education with the needs of the 21st century. However, the successful implementation of NEP 2020 faces numerous challenges. These include addressing barriers to access, improving the quality of teaching and learning, promoting research and innovation, mobilizing adequate funding, resolving legal complexities, and overcoming institutional and systemic limitations. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including the central and state governments, educational institutions, educators, students, and the wider community. Collaboration, innovation, and sustained commitment will be essential to realize the vision of NEP 2020 and transform India's education system into a dynamic and inclusive hub of learning, research, and innovation.

REFERENCES :

1. Jha, P., & Parvati, P. (2020). National Education Policy, 2020. (2020). Governance at Banks, Economic & Political Weekly, 55(34), 14-17.
2. Dixit, R. K. (2020). National education policy (NEP) 2020-opportunities and challenges in teacher education. *National education policy*, 120.
3. Banerjee, M., & Krishnagar, N. (2023). Implementation of NEP 2020 Curriculum: An Overview. *NEP 2020: Implementation Phase*.
4. Sharma, N. K. (2022). NEP 2020: Features, Importance in Education and Role of Teacher.
5. Gandhi, R. (2021). Review on the Key Features of the National Education Policy 2020 in the Context to Pre-school Education and its Expected Impact. *International Journal of Management, Technology and Social Sciences (IJMTS)*, 6(1), 241-252.
6. Kalyani, P. (2020). An empirical study on NEP 2020 [National Education Policy] with special reference to the future of Indian education system and its effects on the Stakeholders. *Journal of Management Engineering and Information Technology*, 7(5), 1-17.

7. Sharma, C. S., Gandhi, S., Pai, R. Y., & Tripathi, A. P. (2023). A Descriptive Study Of Salient Features Of New Education Policy 2020 And Its Impact On Education. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 34, 1814-1827.
8. Ranjith, M. S., & Priya, M. K. A Study on Fundamental Principles and Salient features of NEP 2020 in Different Stages of Education. *Impact of new education policy among future generation*, 370.
9. Kumar, A. (2021). New education policy (NEP) 2020: A roadmap for India 2.0. *University of South Florida (USF) M3 Publishing*, 3(2021), 36.
10. NEP (2020). Policy document released by Government of India Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf on 15 April 2024