

Evaluating the NEP 2020 Vision for Higher Education in India: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 has brought a revolutionary change in the education system of India. Emphasis is placed on each stage of education. This study seeks to analysis how the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) supports student-focused and skill-oriented higher education, while also assessing the inclusive strategies it proposes for diverse social groups within the higher education sector. Education is about access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. The emphasis will be on learning, regardless of the student. Along with education, moral development and holistic development have also been said about. The study used only secondary sources such as authoritative government publications and policy documents, research journal articles, and reliable online sources. It explores the key ideas, goals and potential impacts of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 through a systematic analytical approach.

Keywords: Higher Education Policy in India, 21st Century Education Reforms, Equity and Access in Higher Education, Multidisciplinary and Vocational Education, Internationalization of Indian Education.

Introduction

After more than three decades, India's education sector has witnessed a major transformation - the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, has paved the way for this change. The main objective of this policy is to restructure the entire structure of education from early childhood to higher education. It also includes technical education, teacher training and management of education. NEP 2020 is much more learner-centric, skill-based and inclusive than previous policies. It envisions a future where India, firmly rooted in its culture, can become a global knowledge superpower (Ministry Of Education, 2023). The process of drafting this policy was unprecedentedly participatory - about 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks and 6000 Urban Administrative Units across the country participated in it, making it one of the most democratic education policies in India (NEP, 2020). Outline of this policy. S. R. The recommendations of the Subrahmanyam Committee (2016) and Dr. Kasturirangan Committee (2019) have played an important role. At the core of the policy is the development of critical thinking, creativity, scientific temper and moral consciousness among students - which are vital to survive in today's fast-changing world (Sharma & Rao, 2022). A major change has come in the structure of education - a new curriculum system of 5+3 + 3+4 has been introduced in place of the old 10+2 system. The new framework emphasizes on foundational learning, experiential approach and multilingualism from the primary level. In particular, instruction in a mother tongue or regional language until at least fifth grade is psychologically conducive to children's learning, as many studies have shown that children learn best in their own language (Ahmad, 2024; NEP, 2020, pp. 12-14). In the field of higher education, the NEP 2020 lays out several ambitious plans - such as raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50 per cent by 2035, setting up the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as a single regulatory body, and ensuring the independence and transparency of educational institutions (UGC, 2021). In addition, the policy proposes Multidisciplinary Education and Research University (MERU), National Research Foundation (NRF), Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and multiple entry-exit system, which makes the learning path of students more flexible and personalized (Mukherjee, 2023). The policy is also a major advance in terms of equality. Special funds, education zones and scholarships have been

created for the disadvantaged sections of the society - especially the socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 18-21). With this, the right to education can not only be limited to words but can also take shape in real life. Standing at the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution, this policy will help in building the youth of India with the power of knowledge. It is not just an education policy - it is a futuristic philosophy, which is laying the foundation for the path of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Shil & Singh, 2023). NEP 2020 is a pledge to build a New India by bringing together the traditions of culture, present needs and future possibilities.

Review of the Literature

Analyzing the structure, problems and solutions of professional education under NEP-2020, it can be seen that there are many limitations of the existing methods. These problems are identified by analyzing policy documents and government reports based primarily on secondary sources. However, there was a lack of information based on the opinions of students and teachers. Pilot research and student-industry interaction analysis are proposed for the future.(Parveen, 2023, pp. 5812-5818) Policy documents and institutional frameworks have been analyzed to understand the policy evolution of NEP-2020 and its structural changes. A lack of outcome-based employment impact analysis has left the assessment of actual change incomplete. The need for long-term outcome tracking-based research arises in the future. (Chabarti & Maharana, 2024, pp. 45-67) The possibilities and challenges of Vocational Education are researched on the basis of desktop-based critique and existing literature analysis. Although there are in-depth reviews of policies and documents, there is not enough information on the actual responses of students and the results of employability. Emphasis has been laid on field-based research in future.(Mandal, 2024, pp. 112-115) Lack of infrastructure, teacher training and integration have been identified as major impediments in the implementation of skill-based education. Although policy-based analysis has been done, there is a lack of data at the implementation level. Research on infrastructure audit and teacher training modules is essential in future research.(Mir, 2023) The policy and effectiveness of the implementation of NEP-2020 has been analyzed by conducting a case study based on Delhi University. Changes were analyzed using NSQF documents and university data. However, the need for comparative research in other

disciplines and institutions remains as there is a limitation in only one institution. (Singh & Gunasekaran, 2023, pp. 76-85) A comparative analysis of the policies of 1986 and 2020 shows that the policy linkage with student employment is not clear. Historical policy archives and national data are used, but tracking of actual results is absent. Longitudinal cohort-based research is proposed in the future.(Kumari and Dubey, 2023)Analyzing the professional education of NEP-2020 in the context of the demand of the labor market, it can be seen that the policy-coordination with the structural problems of the labor market is still insufficient. Due to the lack of reliable data on labor mismatch, there is a need to redesign the stakeholder-based framework.(Sengupta, 2020)Data analysis at the national level and a review of the aspects of inclusive education have noted the inclusion gap and opaqueness in digital access in the case of marginalized communities. A proposal to run a region-based pilot program has emerged particularly in the study.(UNESCO-TISS Team, 2023) Analysis of vocational course preferences and attitudes among undergraduate students has shown that small sample sizes and specific region-based studies fail to yield effective results. Large-scale surveys and employment relationship analysis have been proposed.(Naim et al. 2023).In the context of internet connectivity and the digital divide in rural areas, research on the potential educational impact of NEP-2020 is limited. Although there was technical analysis, data on direct impact assessment with education is missing. Future research will require school-level digital infrastructure audits and EdTech-based pilot studies.(Shruti et al. 2021).

Objectives of the Study

- To study Role of NEP 2020 in promoting learner-centric and skill-based higher education.
- To examine inclusivity provisions for diverse social groups in higher education under NEP 2020.

Research Question:

R1: How does NEP 2020 promote learner-centric and skill-based education in Indian higher education?

R2: How effectively is the National Education Policy 2020 creating opportunities for inclusion in higher education for diverse social groups?

Research Gap:

There is not enough data-based research on the impact of accreditation on the quality of education and its actual role in enhancing the employability of students. Detailed research on what kind of experience students and teachers are getting in implementing multidisciplinary and flexible curricula, what obstacles institutions are facing, and what are the best methods is very limited. There is little in-depth and statistical analysis of how the lack of digital access affects the quality and equity of education in rural and backward areas. Not enough research has been done on the factors behind the productivity and motivation of teachers' research activities, such as workload, incentives and institutional support. The reasons for access to higher education, retention of status, and dropout of students from under-privileged communities have not been analyzed in detail from a social and cultural perspective..India's efforts to internationalise higher education, such as the challenges of transferring credits, bringing in foreign students, and regulating the quality of campuses abroad, often lack research or policy analysis. So, these things are important in the field of education but there is a lack of proper research in this regard. These are really important areas of research.

The significance of the research:

The importance of this study is that it analyzes how realistically the National Education Policy 2020 is changing the higher education system. In particular, this policy seeks to make education more learner-centric and flexible, so that students can choose subjects according to their interests and abilities. At the same time, along with knowledge, emphasis has also been laid on skill development, which is directly related to future employment. The policy did not think only about the city or the beneficiary class. It plans to facilitate access to higher education for rural, marginalized, economically weaker or socially disadvantaged students. For example, scholarships, online education facilities, teaching in the mother tongue, introduction of support systems for disabled and women have been talked about. This study will show how India is trying to build an inclusive education system with the help of this policy, where no one will be

left behind. At the same time, it will also show how solid the foundation is being laid for the dream of making India a global education leader through research and international cooperation.

National Education Policy 2020: A New Vision For Higher Education

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes a historic transformation in India's higher education sector.

National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC)

NHERC will act as the main regulatory arm of HECI. It will supervise the activities of all higher education institutions except medical and legal education. Institutions will be forced to disclose financial and administrative information, and transparency of institutions will be assessed on the basis of student feedback (NEP, 2020). The light but strict regulatory policy is said to reduce administrative pressure and protect quality (GoI, 2021).

2. The National Accreditation Council (NAC)

NAC is proposed to be set up as an independent accreditation body in place of the existing NAAC. It will follow a dual stream (Recognized / Denied) approach in the assessment of educational institutions, so as to establish transparent and measurable criteria. Technology-based verification, self-assessment and third-party assistance will be used in the assessment (Ministry Of Education, 2020, pp. 46-47).

3. Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)

HEGC will be an institution that will control the financial endowment of educational institutions. Outcome-based financing will be introduced so that allocation can be made based on actual performance and quality improvement (PIB, 2020). Besides, this institution will play an important role in the distribution of scholarships and the implementation of new innovative projects (Ministry of Education, 2020).

4. The General Education Council (GEC)

The GEC will act as an academic standard-setting body. This will help the students to acquire skills as per the demands of the 21st century. The National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will bring academic and vocational education together (UGC, 2021; PIB, 2021).

The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)

The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in India started to be implemented in various universities and colleges from around 2015. In this method, students can choose courses from different subjects according to their wishes and interests. Each course has a specific credit allocation, and when the student meets the total required credits, they are able to earn a degree. CBCS allows students to take a variety of courses together and the assessment of learning is done through a grading system. The National Education Policy 2020 lays special emphasis on developing multi skills of students by making the system more modern and efficient.

National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) :Unified and Recognized Level of Education A clear structure of education levels is defined by the NHEQF: Level 1-2: Certificate Program Level 3-4: Diploma ,Level 5: Bachelor's degree, Level 6: Master's degree Level 7: Ph. D. or doctoral degree This structure is linked to the NSQF, allowing students to move easily between academic and technical education (Chakraborty & Singh, 2021; Pai, 2024).

The Power of Language: Mother Tongue and Multilingualism

One of the key features of NEP 2020 is mother tongue-based education. Introducing teaching in the local language at the primary level and applying this method in higher education if necessary (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.13). In particular, the creation of bilingual textbooks on subjects such as science and technology has been called for (Ministry of Education, 2020, p.14)..In addition, the emphasis is on mastering three languages (vernacular, English and a classical language), which will enable students to develop national unity, diversity and global readiness

(Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 14-15). Studies show that mother tongue-based learning improves classroom participation, understanding and outcomes (Ahmad, 2025; Shil & Singh, 2024; Wiley Journal, 2024; UNICEF India, 2024).

Indian Sign Language (ISL) for students with special needs

Indian Sign Language (ISL) has been accepted as a recognized language in NEP 2020 and instruction has been given to make educational materials suitable for hearing impaired students (Ministry of Education, 2020). A 5-day free ISL course was recently launched under NCERT - 21,600 + participants (NCERT, 2025). This has paved the way for the inclusion of Children with Special Needs (CwSN) in the mainstream of education.

Towards a more integrated and multidisciplinary education

The ancient education system of India has always emphasized on an integrated approach, where art, science and practical skills were taught together. Evidence of this can be found in ancient universities such as Takshashila and Nalanda (Mukherjee, 2020). Banabhatta's Kadambari also mentions the practice of 64 kalas, which is compatible with today's concept of liberal arts (Sharma, 2018). The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes on the cognitive, social, emotional and moral development of students. The policy seeks to create an integrated learning environment through multi-disciplinary education (Ministry of Education, 2020). By 2040, universities will have a system where students can take a variety of courses and develop themselves as more efficient, creative and responsible citizens (NEP 2020, page 34).

4-year integrated undergraduate degree

The 4-year undergraduate degree structure introduced as per NEP 2020 highlights a flexible and research-based pedagogy. Students can choose major and minor subjects - such as major in physics and minor in music (Ministry of Education, 2020). On the basis of research work in the final year, students can get a degree like B.Sc Honours or B.Sc Research. This pattern prepares students for critical thinking, analysis, and higher education or research-based workplaces (UGC, 2022).

Multiple Exit Option and Digital Learning

The National Education Policy 2020 has provided opportunities for students to complete different levels of education at different times. As a result, one can earn a certificate at the end of the first year, a diploma at the end of the second year, or a bachelor's degree in the third year. This approach has made the path of education more flexible and accessible, especially for those who find it difficult to continue their studies for a long time. At the same time, the policy has given special importance to the spread of digital education. Various initiatives have been taken to strengthen online education to deal with any pandemic or technological obstacles in the future. Various educational institutions and platforms in the country such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, IGNOU, IIT, etc. are experimentally testing the effectiveness of online education.

A digital library will be established, which will have advanced technologies such as augmented and virtual reality and educational gaming content. In addition, efforts will be made to reach students through television, radio and community radio so that no one falls behind in education due to lack of technology. Tablets and offline learning materials will also be provided to the lagging students. Online training opportunities will also be expanded to enhance the skills of teachers, so that they can keep pace with modern teaching.

The Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)

On July 29, 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) on the one year anniversary of NEP 2020. In this system, students can digitally store academic credits earned through various courses or institutions (Ministry of Education, 2021). Every

student has a unique ABC ID and the credits are credited to the digital account in whichever subject they are pursuing or even doing an internship (UGC, 2021). This system is a big bone for the students who once left their studies in the middle, as they will be able to use the previously depleted credit if they are re-admitted. Under this system, it is possible to earn credits from the students studying science even if they learn music or sports (NEP 2020; Ministry of Education, 2021).

Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)

As per NEP 2020, Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) will be set up to improve the quality of higher education, which will work towards excellence in education and research while maintaining the standards of IITs and IIMs (NEP 2020; Kannan, 2024). HEIs will have master's programs where 3-year graduates will be admitted to 2-year masters and 4-year research-based graduates will be admitted to 1-year master's programs (Sengupta, 2023). There will also be a 5-year integrated program. M.Phil degree has been discontinued. Now Ph.D.-R requires a master's or dissertation 4-year bachelor's degree. Emphasis will be laid on interdisciplinary research on AI, agriculture, health, etc. To this end, the SWAYAM platform will facilitate online learning (NEP 2020; KK Sushudha Samhita, 2023; Sivakumaran & Thangavel, 2019).

Equality and Inclusive Education: Education for All

Education is not only an individual right, it is an essential social justice instrument for national progress. In the context of India, it is very important to ensure that children from all sections of the society have equal access to quality education. Students from socio-economically backward classes (SEDGs) - such as women, third gender, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, OBCs, minorities, rural children, disabled and poverty-stricken families - still face barriers. Although some progress has been made at the primary level, the disparity is still stark in secondary and higher

education. In particular, the rate of education among girls belonging to marginalized groups decreases significantly (Sahoo, 2020). Therefore, the goal of NEP 2020 is to ensure inclusive and equitable education.

Institutional Innovation And Technology Integration

1. The National Research Foundation (NRF)

National Research Foundation (NRF) has been introduced to encourage research and innovation in National Education Policy 2020. The institute will develop an integrated system that will encourage interdisciplinary research based on different themes. For example, new areas of research will be created by combining artificial intelligence and health, agriculture or law. This form of policy-based organization will open new horizons of research in higher education and develop creative thinking among students (Kumar, 2021).

2. National Committee on Mainstreaming of Professional Education:

A National Committee has been constituted under NEP 2020 to promote the importance of professional education in the education system of India. Through this initiative, technical education and skill development will be linked to the mainstream. While only 5% of youth (aged 19-24 years) receive formal vocational training in India, 75% in Germany and 96% in South Korea participate in this training. In order to fill this gap, it is planned to include at least 50% students of school and higher education level in some professional education by 2025. This initiative will increase employment opportunities through local demand-based skill development (Verma, 2021).

3. National Forum for Technology in Education (NETF)

The National Education Technology Forum (NETF) has been set up under NEP 2020 for effective integration of technology with education. It is a knowledge-based platform, where teachers, policymakers and technology experts will work together. The aim is to promote technology-based learning and develop new digital learning strategies. NETF is moving towards

building a flexible and inclusive education system by balancing traditional teaching methods with modern education (Ministry of Education, 2020).

4. NEAT (National Educational Alliance for Technology)

The National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) has been formed to increase the opportunities of digital education for backward and technology-deficient students. It mainly promotes the expansion of education through digital platforms to improve the quality and availability of education. With the help of artificial intelligence, NEAT adapts to the individual needs of the learner. In addition, it is building an integrated and comprehensive educational ecosystem based on technology in collaboration with SWAYAM, NDLI and other digital initiatives (Gupta et al., 2021).

5. NTA's role in the transformation of the national examination system:

The National Testing Agency (NTA) has been given a central role in the National Education Policy to change the examination-based education system. The institute will conduct aptitude and subject-based tests multiple times a year from now on, which will test the conceptual knowledge and application ability of the students. This will reduce the dependence of the students on coaching and they will be able to take the exam by choosing the subject of their choice. These changes are aimed at making the admission process from undergraduate to higher research levels more transparent and talent-based (Mounika & Thamarana, 2023).

Global Engagement Initiative

NEP 2020: Fostering Global Academic Partnerships

India is making efforts to position itself as a leading destination for international students. The country plans to offer a broad spectrum of programs, including subjects such as Indology, Indian languages, yoga, arts, music, history, and modern India. In addition, global subjects in science and social sciences will be prioritized to address the educational needs of students worldwide Sahoo,(2024). To support international students, every higher education institution (HEI) will set up an International Students Office, ensuring smooth integration and providing essential help.

India will also focus on forming research and academic partnerships with prestigious international institutions, encouraging faculty and student exchanges through agreements with foreign nations. Furthermore, India will promote its leading universities to establish 100 campuses abroad and invite the world's top universities to operate within the country. A new legal framework will be introduced to address governance, regulatory guidelines, and academic standards. The recognition of credits from foreign universities will contribute to a more interconnected global educational network (Ministry Of Education, 2020).

Methodology

This study is entirely based on secondary data obtained from a wide range of credible sources. These include official policy documents, reports, and publications from the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission (UGC), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), DIKSHA, UNICEF, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Additional data were gathered from reputable national and international research papers, scholarly articles, books, conference proceedings, and credible news portals. The data collection was done through specific online research and the collected materials were analyzed using the Content Analysis method.

Challenges in implementing NEP 2020: Policy vs Reality

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aimed to bring about a paradigm shift in the education system, but in reality, various obstacles have hampered its implementation. Poor internet connectivity, erratic power supply and lack of digital devices in rural and remote areas have reduced students' participation in online learning. (As per NSSO 2019-20 data) The shortage of trained teachers and textbooks in mother tongue education has increased the pressure

on students to focus on English and Hindi. (NCERT ,2022)The youth are less likely to participate in technical and vocational training. (As per NSSO and AICTE reports)The educational progress of backward castes and tribes is hampered by social and economic disparities. (As per AISHE 2021-22 and UGC data) The gap in the quality and budget of education across states hinders equal opportunities. Lack of effective coordination between universities and industry weakens the market-oriented requirements of education. Lack of mental health support in educational institutions has a negative impact on the well-being of students. (Data from NIMHANS and Ministry of Health)

Swot Analysis Of Nep 2020

Strengths

- The four-year integrated course saves time and resources by combining undergraduate and postgraduate education.
- It provides students with an opportunity to develop physically, mentally, morally, socially and creatively.
- Through the CBCS system, students can choose subjects according to their interests and needs, which increases their skills and independence.
- With special emphasis on research and innovation in higher education, new ideas and scientific progress are possible.
- The use of modern technologies such as digital learning, online courses and artificial intelligence makes the education process more advanced and effective.
- An inclusive environment is ensured for students from all classes and abilities of the society.
- Opportunities are created for students to participate in global competition in line with international standards.

Weaknesses

- The four-year integrated course increases the pressure on students due to the large number of papers at once, which increases mental and academic anxiety.

- The examination-oriented education system and conventional educational attitudes hinder comprehensive development.
- The implementation of CBCS presents difficulties in coordinating courses and assigning credits among different universities.
- There is a lack of adequate funding and modern facilities for research.
- There is a negative attitude towards accepting social differences, which affects inclusive education.
- The dominance of foreign educational institutions can reduce the competitiveness of local institutions in the country.

Opportunities

- A four-year integrated course provides students with a competitive advantage in the international job market.
- In the context of globalization, opportunities arise to acquire versatile and up-to-date skills.
- It paves the way for in-depth research on specific subjects over a long period of time and new innovations.
- Integrated courses have the potential to expand through digital and online education.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen the position of students in terms of employment and higher education.

Threats

- Lack of necessary infrastructure and trained teaching resources can affect the quality of education.
- There is a possibility of students becoming discouraged or frustrated in their studies due to reduced interest.
- There is a risk of students becoming stressed and demoralized due to the long academic year.
- Students may fall behind if the course does not align with the rapidly changing employment demands.

- Increased competition in entrance exams may increase pressure and anxiety on students.

Conclusion:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 stands as a visionary and ambitious reform that aims to overhaul the Indian education system from its very roots. With its emphasis on foundational learning, flexibility in subject choices, mother tongue-based education in early years, integration of technology, and focus on equity and inclusion, NEP 2020 seeks to create a learner-centric, multidisciplinary, and skill-driven ecosystem. It envisions education not just as a means of academic success but as a tool for holistic development—preparing students to think critically, act ethically, and adapt to the rapidly evolving global landscape. However, turning this vision into reality requires more than policy on paper—it demands committed action on the ground. Effective implementation will depend on sustained cooperation between central and state governments, proactive curriculum redesign, extensive teacher training, bridging the digital divide, and ensuring adequate infrastructure in both rural and urban areas. The success of NEP will also rely on continuous monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and community participation to address regional needs and cultural diversity. Despite the challenges, the opportunities presented by NEP 2020 are immense. It has the potential to democratize education by making it accessible, inclusive, and relevant for every learner, irrespective of their socio-economic background. If implemented in letter and spirit, NEP 2020 can pave the way for a future-ready India—where education becomes a powerful force for innovation, social mobility, and national progress. In essence, NEP 2020 is not just a reform; it is a long-term investment in the intellectual and moral foundation of the nation.

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