Revolutionizing Indian Education with National Education Policy 2020

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ABSTRACT

Education is a dynamic set-up which shapes an individual's development during their critical learning period. Such a set-up hence becomes a key ingredient in society's development as a whole. A national education policy serves as a description of a nation's education goals in principle and a direction towards the practical ways to achieve them. The need for such a policy is rooted in the dominant problems with the status-quo. In India, the education system currently identifies problems that relate to employability, equal opportunity and flexibility in learning. Nation Education Policy 2020[1] (NEP 2020) received approval from the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020. Principally, this policy aims to build an education system that is equitable, accessible and transforms India into a global knowledge superpower whilst staying rooted in Indian ethos. It is important to understand the policy and its impact on education system in times to come. This article intends to provide its readers an objective and un-biased understanding of NEP 2020.

KEYWORDS

Education Policy, National Education Policy 2020, Vocational training, Equitable, Holistic development, Indian ethos, Life-long education, Sustainable Development Goals

POLICY OVERVIEW

NEP 2020 is the third educational policy introduced in India. It outlines the vision of India's new education system and aims to transform it by 2040. The key areas of focus include (a) school education[2] (b) higher education[3] (c) vocational training, (d) life- long education, (e) integration of technology in discourse of education and (f) promotion of Indian languages and culture.

Stakeholders: A stakeholder is any entity that can be affected by the achievement of the objectives laid down in NEP 2020. These beneficiaries can also catalyse the call for a change in policy. In short, the policy is as good as the benefits it can provide to its stakeholders. NEP 2020 has accommodated for about 1.5 lakh of feedbacks on the policy draft, increasing the quality and decreasing the risk variables in the policy. The primary stakeholders in this policy are students, facilitators in educational institutions and government. The secondary stakeholders are vendors who buy and sell books, printing

agencies, employers and corporate organizations who invest in educational and skill development programs as corporate social responsibility hence are also impacted by these systemic reforms.

<u>Forecasting Needs</u>: We are already witnessing a paradigm shift between the way teachers teach and students assimilate information. This change is aligned to the changing needs of education sector to provide for the holistic development of the student backed with skills that are relevant to their career trajectory. Teaching is increasingly becoming student centric with value being placed on the personalized learning strategies and maximizing the output from the student's creative potential. Disciplining methods that once used to dictate how a child studies are now being replaced with friendly and entertaining approaches to teaching. The government has accurately identified these trends in changing needs and shifted the focus on individual development by customizing the learning as well as the evaluation process. It takes a step forward in the direction of customizing education by means of maximizing the pool of options students have access to when choosing their subjects. The interest-based learning goes on to create a diverse pool of candidates in the job market. It also provides greater incentive to continue higher-education. Increased emphasis on experience-based learning makes education fun and pragmatic. The policy takes into account the maximum possible setbacks relevant to Indian demographics and maximizes flexibility in learning for masses.

<u>Defining Targets:</u> It is easy to notice that the NEP 2020 is an empowering extension of the government's intention of making India self-

reliant by catalysing personal growth. The policy aims to put India on the route to attaining sustainable development goal 4 of the 2030 agenda by offering inclusive and equitable education with opportunity of lifelong learning. It takes a step forward in internationalization of education[4] by providing legislation that backs and supports the best foreign universities to operate in India and vice versa. Ensuring the highest quality of education are the clauses on giving the teachers the agency to contextualize and customize[5] their classrooms to maximize outcome in terms of learning. The up-gradation in learning quality is backed by targeting one teacher per thirty students and usage of DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing).

<u>Assumptions:</u> NEP seems to operate on the assumption the current capitalistic model of education in a lot of private institutions, which is highly competitive and prioritizes revenue generation over altruism-, is an efficient one. As these institutions further go on to become multidisciplinary it is natural that the investment capital will rise far sooner than the returns on those investments start coming in. In this situation, the policy assumes that this potential hike in fee will not deter access in the first place.

<u>Policy Legitimation:</u> NEP 2020 as a policy draft has been legitimized by receiving feedback from over 2.5 Lakh village level stakeholders, 2 parliamentary committees and over 50 months of consultations and workshops.

<u>Implementation & Impact:</u> The implementation plan of NEP 2020 is called SARTHAQ which stands for Students' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement through Quality Education

(SARTHAQ). While the practical impact of NEP 2020 cannot be assessed before its implementation, it is safe to say that this is an incredibly promising policy[6] in terms of principle and educational experience. If successfully implemented, it will go on to change the face of India on many levels by empowering the population with quality education.

POLICY CONTEXT: HISTORY OF PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OFFERED

Since the onset of free India, the primary concern of legislators has been to tackle the educational inequality which was aggravated by (a) economic inequality, (b) gender disparity and (c) rigid social stratification. Since NEP 2020 is not the first of its kind, it's important for us to understand the context on which this extension has been made.

There have been three educational policies formulated in free India. The first policy was made in 1968[7] in which major emphasis was on compulsory education till the age of 14 since there existed regional imbalances in the provision of educational facilities, especially in rural areas. The educational commission set up back then suggested the adoption of a common school system to promote social cohesion and national integration. It was the first vision formulated for the future of education in India. In 1986, in the second policy document[8], the focus changed from access to (a) all round development, (b) a deeper sense of mental as well as spiritual liberation and (c) furthering the ideas of socialism, secularism and democracy.

NEP 2020 has built on these basic ideas of uniform educational access and quality over the years and acknowledged the problems that surfaced in this model of education. Fitting every child in the same mould, evaluating them in a way that requires static skills and knowledge is increasingly losing its relevance in the evolving global times. These have been the driving forces behind the shift in priorities from the last policy. NEP 2020 now places its focus on augmenting individual capacity and achieving excellence in the field of choice. The focus has essentially changed from irrelevant rote learning to relevant skills like problem solving, critical thinking, self-assessment and better interpersonal skills.

Major changes at the school level:

(a) The pattern of schooling was previously 10+2 years, where students studied common subjects till class 10 and chose one of the available combinations of subjects like arts, commerce and science in 11th grade. The two component model of 10 (generic) + 2 (specific) years of study of subjects has been changed to a 4 component system.5 (foundational) + 3 (preparatory) + 3 (middle) + 4 (secondary) years of schooling model.

(b) Government schools previously did not have the initial 3 year pre-primary schooling; this is a new structural change that has been formalized by NEP 2020. So, mandatory schooling has shifted from 6-14 years of age to 3-18 years of age.

(c) For pre-primary schooling, the government is currently dependent on Aanganwaadi

but it's important to understand that these Aanganwaadi workers are neither trained nor equipped to teach yet. In response, the government is going to run training initiatives.

(d) In the 10+2 system, students earlier could choose their stream in 11th grade but now the choice is offered from a range of combinations of subjects of their interest right from grade 9.

(e) The board exams will be conducted in grade 10 and 11 but value placed on these scores will be decreased and the focus will shift to testing application of knowledge acquired by the student. Subjects will be divided into levels: basic, medium and advanced and students will have the choice to pick from these.

(f) Vocational subjects such as sports will be given the same weightage as curricular subjects such as arts and science. Evaluation was previously done only by teachers but now will be done by peers and the student as well. All these changes in assessment and curriculum will take effect right from the 2022-23 academic session.

Major changes at university level and beyond

(a) Students currently write a variety of exams for college admissions. These exams will be replaced by a common entrance exam which will be conducted at-least twice a year. This clause has not been made mandatory. Hence, there are apprehensions regarding it existing only on paper, unless made compulsory for

acceptance by all universities.

(b) In terms of management of higher education, currently UGC is the governing body which will be replaced by Higher Education Commission of India[9]. All bodies governing various fields like Medical Council of India, body regulating legal colleges etc. will be dissolved and Higher Education Commission of India will be the central regulatory authority.

(c) Colleges and universities will be made multi-disciplinary[10] i.e they will offer courses in multiple fields instead of one. The educational curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and student support will be revamped for enhanced student experiences[11]. Research will also be funded and encouraged to seed research in universities and colleges.

(d) Four Year Undergraduate programs with multiple exit options will be launched i.e. if a student enrolled in this program drops out after (a) one year- they will be awarded a certificate (b) two years- an advanced diploma, (c) three years- a bachelor's degree and (d) four years- a bachelors research degree. On the brighter side this will accommodate for circumstantial barriers in completing education, but in the worst case scenario, this might go on to act as a deterrent from pursuing entire four year courses when taking in factors like financial and family pressure into the perspective.

(e) Government has also decided to facilitate life-long learning for citizens, allowing them to complete their degrees later in life.

NEP 2020: MAJOR CONCERNS

The major concerns raised by the general voting pool and opposition on clauses in NEP 2020 are elaborated below. It is proposed that government should address these concerns and take affirmative action in this direction to preserve the meaning of a true and progressing democracy.

(a) Language of instruction has always been a controversial issue in every educational policy. Latest policy NEP 2020 states that the wherever possible medium of instruction should be student's mother tongue/local language/regional language at-least till grade 5 but preferably till grade 8 and beyond. This is expected to be followed by both- public and private schools. The key word here is "where ever possible". Since "education" is a subject in the concurrent list, the state governments cannot be forced to follow one language as medium of instruction.

(b) Further, critics claim this clause on regional language preference will increase the linguistic divide and raise another generation of citizens with linguistic barriers. English being the most accepted international language of communication currently taught in schools- facilitates our entry into the international job markets. Compromised competence in speaking English students will go on to isolate students even further.

(c) Schooling in regional languages will also discourage inter-state migration as a shift in linguistic environment will be uncomfortable for students, this can be another cause of stagnation with repercussions on economy.

The policy is of high quality in terms of principle but there are genuine concerns regarding it's manifestation in reality since its success heavily depends on its successful implementation in local contexts.

WAY FORWARD

For the first time in decades, NEP 2020 as a policy presents solutions to almost all the problems existing in the current education system. The utility of this policy, however, highly depends on the success of its implementation. Imagine a classroom in a rural set up where not many teachers are available. Further, teachers, besides teaching, also shoulder the administrative responsibilities. The government intends to start introducing technology-aided teaching after grade 6 in this school. Does it have the infrastructure to support it? Teachers will need to familiarize themselves with technology in order to efficiently derive value from it. Are enough steps being taken to make teaching an attractive profession in the first place?

In order to bring in a teaching workforce which is capable in imparting high quality vocational training and has a field expertise in multi-disciplinary colleges- the government will need to increase incentives for educators and facilitators. These incentives will aid the transition from single

to multidisciplinary institutions in terms of the initial marketability cost and other costs. If NEP2020 manages to overcome the real-time barriers, it will be the best thing that happens to India- completing revamping the social and economic constructs of society.

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