

## **National Education Policy 2020: The Challenges & Possibilities Ahead**

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### **Abstract**

Education has always been regarded as the foundation on which the human resource potential can be fully utilized for productive purposes. Access to quality education is the best gift which can be given to the youth of any nation. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 (henceforth NEP) was introduced on July 20, 2020. It also marked a renaming of the Ministry of Human Resource Development as Ministry of Education. With the aim of transforming the nation into a vibrant knowledge hub, the NEP has many challenges and possibilities ahead and the present paper is a survey of the same.

### **Keywords**

Education, policy, knowledge, skill development, planning, human resource, challenges, possibilities.

### **Main Article**

The NEP 2020 is a positive step towards revamping and restructuring the prevalent education system so that the needs of the 21st century are met comfortably. Access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability are some of the major policy objectives underlined by the blueprint of NEP.<sup>1</sup> The policy is remarkable but it certainly needs good implementation and execution at all levels.

The objective is to achieve a modern and progressive education system which is rooted in the wisdom of the civilization of India. At the same time, the need to equip the youth for the challenges of the future is also taken care of. As far as the major challenges are concerned, the idea needs to be made accessible to all so as to make it fully comprehensive and compatible to the needs of the nation in the coming future. It also demands a proper resource mobilization and channeling towards a better

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<sup>1</sup> A.Arun Kumar, "New Education Policy 2020-Major Challenges" in *Samachar Nirdesh*, October, 2020.

suiting prioritization. Obviously, education is the foundation of any society and in our country the tradition of education has been quite old. In these circumstances the challenges of resources and funds, addressed judiciously are certainly going to bear positive results.

On a rough estimate it is said that around three hundred fifty million school-college goers are going to be the first ones to experience the direct consequences of the policy. The other strata of society are going to experience this much later through these students. India Today and Times survey analysis has placed the NEP 2020 as the one of the most extensive programmes in the world which would be implemented. This certainly needs very guided and regulated planning. The scope is multifaceted for NEP and so are the challenges. We would now discuss some of the major challenges.

Doubling the figure of Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education by 2035 certainly requires a large number of Universities and post-school Colleges. At present there are around 1000 Universities and this indicates that our country needs more and more Universities in the years to come. This highlights the issues involved in resource availability and the expertise of instructors and mentors so as to achieve the desired goal.<sup>2</sup>

Same is the situation in schools. According to an estimate nearly two crore students at present are not enrolled in schools (either formal, informal or vocational). Bringing them all under the able guidance of schools again needs a large number of schools to be established and is a litmus test of resources both Human and material. Establishing schools, colleges and universities only are not going to solve the problem. We also need power supply, laboratories, libraries, internet connectivity, and many other secondary variables to make NEP a reality in its objectives. Similarly the teaching positions at both, school and University level needs to be taken care of. NEP aims to broaden the horizon of non-conventional and vocational courses but it would also require instructors, teachers and guides specialized in the same, which is a very tough challenge in the light of the present passouts, their expertise and placements from most of the institutes.

Such ambitious projects such as the NEP need a huge investment. The National Education Policy 2020 aims to enhance the annual spending on education from 4.6 percent of GDP at present to 6 percent of GDP which is certainly an approximate increase of about 2.5 lakh crores per year. It needs to be pointed out that the expected expenditure is not a huge amount but keeping in mind the present state of our economy and the potential for growth in the near future, it needs lots of serious engagement to ensure the supply of funds. One cannot rely solely on donations from industrialists and other market oriented agencies when the objective is to improvise the educational system of the entire nation for a better future.<sup>3</sup>

The strain on exchequer would not ease soon because other sectors such as healthcare etc. are also placing huge demands for funds and resources after the covid 2019. It is certainly a challenge to manage the resources but we all are certainly hopeful that together we will be able to overcome all the hurdles and achieve what has been desired through NEP.

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<sup>2</sup> Preeti Kumar, Alexander W. Wiseman, *Teacher Quality and Education Policy in India: Understanding The Relationship between Teacher Education, Teacher Effectiveness and Student Outcomes*, Routledge, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Krishna Kumar, *Routledge Handbook of Education in India: Debates, Practices and Policies*, Routledge, 2017.

Speaking of the other challenges and possibilities ahead, one can bring to focus the rural-urban divide and the lack of interdisciplinarity in the mode of instruction at most of the institutions. Then comes the biggest question of the placement of the ‘products and consumers’ (the passouts) of the NEP. <sup>4</sup> We also need to ensure that our markets are fully equipped to absorb and engage the passouts in more than one way. A Nation thrives on the policies made to ensure the long term sustainable development and in this context the National Education Policy 2020 is a much needed welcome step.

Talking of the possibilities ahead, we can say that NEP is certainly going to revolutionize the education system in our country. As noted above the NEP marks the renaming of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to the Ministry of Education. It promotes the spirit of a strongly knit national identity as also reflected in the spirit of “Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat”. Broadly speaking it includes widening of the scope of scholarships, increasing the facilities of adult and continuing education, besides building up the infrastructure for Open and distance learning. This will go a long way in promoting the cause of the non-formal education sector. After Covid 19, the greater reliance on online mode of interaction has also been a major aspect of NEP. Keeping in mind the needs and requirements of the future, it proposes to maintain a large share of the entire teaching-learning-interactive process online streamlined through several modes. It was a long overdue and much awaited reform in the Indian Education system. The proposal aims to make a positive impact on the lives of the coming generations besides paving the path of the creation of better citizens for the future of the nation.

As far as the major possibilities and scope are concerned we can begin with the changes proposed in the governance and regulation. Except the medical and law colleges, all other institutions would be henceforth governed and regulated by a single authority. This is going to improve decision making and implementation of the reforms efficiently. The hassles of bureaucratic apparatus and limitations of separate policy making bodies are done away with, making it easy for the single regulator body to not only maintain the desired standards but also achieve the goals set for the institution within the given time frame. It also aims to assist the institutions in overcoming the drawbacks of institutional frameworks and learn from other institutions’ achievements as the regulating body would now be the same. In the same vein the distinction in the management of government and private institutions of higher education are also done away with and now both, the private and the government institutions of higher education would be governed under the similar norms.

Increasing the duration of the Undergraduate courses and simultaneously amending the duration and structure of masters courses the NEP aims to ease the research modalities and for this purpose the present course of M.Phil (offered in many Universities) has been done away with. We need to keep in mind that the undergraduate courses are so designed to introduce the student to research modalities and methodology that a separate M.Phil course may not be needed. This move is certainly going to enhance the significance of college and undergraduate learning.

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<sup>4</sup> Pradeep Kumar Choudhary, Suresh Babu GS, *Contextualizing Educational Studies in India: Research, Policy and Practices*, Routledge, 2021.

A much needed reform was long due in the field of board exams and the NEP proposes to make the board exams based on a wider domain of knowledge and application. Kind of hands-on activity and lived experience would certainly introduce the student to the richness of academic fields and also help in achieving the objective of connecting learning to the practical aspects of day to day living.

Greater emphasis is to be laid on the medium of instruction and as expected it has to be in the vernacular regional language or the mother tongue of the student. Instruction upto the fifth grade has to mandatorily be in the regional vernacular. From sixth grade onwards the student would be introduced to vocational courses which would help in honing up their skills in fields other than pure academics. The practice of rote learning and booking knowledge would gradually give way to innovative thinking of the students. This is a welcome move as it will help in enhancing the grasping and comprehending capacities of the student. Ease of medium of instruction would in the long run help promote novel thinking and innovative approach to the challenges ahead.

While the school curriculum has to focus more on the core concepts and their understanding, the entry to the institutions of higher learning has to be through a common entrance test. A common entrance test at the national level for all the institutions of higher learning is certainly going to reduce the pressure of scores, marks and grades on the students and promote the idea of innovative thinking. The recent board scores and the university cut-offs have touched the magical figures of hundred percent and this is certainly a matter of grave concern as it would lead to a larger frustration amongst the students besides leading to undue peer-pressure. The existing structure of the 10+2 system of education is proposed to be replaced by the new structure of 5+3+4 corresponding to the age groups of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14 and 14-18 years respectively. Students of the age group 3 to 6 years are to be introduced to 3 years of pre-schooling or anganwadi (as the case may be).

The National Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFCE) is planned to be created by the NCERT specially for the children upto 8 years of age. Early Childhood care and education (ECCE) has to be strictly followed in anganwadis and kindergartens-nursery schools. The staff at these bodies would also be provided with adequate training, exposure and skill enhancement periodically in advanced programmes and pedagogies. The ECCE would be closely monitored by several Government agencies such as the Ministry of Women and Child development, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the MHRD. These measures would enable the student to grow, evolve and mature naturally in a properly guarded system of grading. These features aim to enhance the standard of learning for all, irrespective of their differential access to education. If implemented as per the guidelines the NEP is going to be a support for India's quest for being a superpower in the days to come.

Universal access to education has been extended from the stage of pre-school to higher education. The students and their levels of learning would be regularly monitored and tracked. The innovative education centres and skill oriented courses aim to reduce the school-dropout cases and even bring back the dropouts to the mainstream of learning. This learning no doubt has to be innovative and value based. The developed infrastructure would further act as a positive catalyst. Access to counselors, trained social workers, mentor-mentee systems and many more provisions are certainly going to improve the ratio of student intake and retention. This would automatically reduce

the cases of dropouts and failures. Provisions for open schooling and distance education would add to the flexibility of the existing education system. These are to be achieved through many planned adult-literacy and value life-enrichment programmes.

The national Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy aims to enhance the learning capabilities in students till the age of three. The curriculum advancements for all the grades involves the attainment of twenty-first century key skills. The enhancement of essential learning, practical and critical thinking, and experience based learning outcomes. A reduction in conventional curriculum is added upon by the wider flexibility in choosing subjects at all the levels. The age old distinction between science, commerce and mathematics are to be done away with. Academic life is to be balanced with sports, co-curricular activities and other vocational training. Internships and incentives aim to improve the level of student participation.

Competency based assessment system is another hallmark of NEP. The older system of summative assessment had its own share of problems and at times it curtailed the free growth of the student. Analytical, critical and conceptual thinking of the students need to be enhanced in the course of learning and the same needs to be the subject matter of evaluation. Competent authorities would have a proper assessment system for the levels 3, 5 and 8. Integrated development of the child has to be the objective of assessment in classes 10th and 12th which would continue to be known as the board exams. Assessment centres such as PARAKH (Performance, Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) is to be established as the standard setting body.

The equitable and inclusive education echoes all through the draft of NEP. Equality on the front of education has always been on the back foot in the previous system and the NEP aims to do away with these drawbacks. The socially and economically disadvantaged groups would be paid special attention. Focus would be on disabilities accruing due to gender, geography, physical, social and other factors. To cope up with these disabilities there would be provisions for gender inclusion funds, special education zones in disadvantaged regions, regular schooling under the guidance of trained faculty for disabled students, training, accommodation, appropriate technology, etc would also be provided for the disadvantaged groups. Specially designed Bal Bhavans are to be established to take care of extracurricular activities related to career and sports, etc. Schools Standards Authority and School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework are to be established for a better care of the schools and other educational institutions.

The NEP aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio GER, which is 26.3% to 50% by 2035 and in order to achieve this target, it aims to increase the number of seats and the faculty as well. Multidisciplinary, holistic and broad based undergraduate learning programmes with flexible course structure aims to increase the retention and continuity of students in institutions of higher education. Provision of flexible entry and exit in the courses with proper authorised certification is another feature which adds to the charm of NEP when it comes to higher education. A larger option of subjects and papers to make choices and the easy option of opting for subjects across the parent discipline aim to improve and increase the multidisciplinary. The provision to carry forward and store the accrued credits is another such feature. The four years of undergraduate programme is structured as certificate after 1 year, advanced diploma after 2 years, license after 3 years and research licence after 4 years. The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is to function as

the coordinating body for all institutions of higher education, except medical and law. Some add ons to the administrative machinery are proposed as NHERC (The National Council for the Regulation of Higher education), GEC (The General Council of Education for Standardisation), HEGC (The Council for Higher Education Grants) for funding purposes, NAC (The Nation Accreditation Council for Accreditation). There is also a provision to penalise the institutions if they fall short or fail to meet the norms set up by the regulatory bodies.

The range and scope of functioning of the institutions of higher learning is to be a vast one. The institutions may be research-intensive, education-intensive or even independent degree granting colleges. Gradations of autonomy for the institutions aims to improve the level of performance by initiating a healthy competition amongst them. Adequate facilities need to be made and ensured for the faculty development, training and skill enhancement. The Minimum qualification standards are to be strictly observed. Online courses, digital repositories and other means of interaction other than formal classroom teaching are to be developed as an inherent part of the pedagogy. The aim is to ensure the availability of quality education in a wide variety of modes for the interested candidates, round the year. The goal of e-education has also been enshrined in NEP to cater to the needs of the coming generation. Vocational education as in the case of schools are also to be an inherent part of the curriculum of higher education besides all types of occupational education and training. This is to be done to strengthen the base of the students for different professions and occupations they intend to pursue later in life. Some might make these the basis of their career and might even look for entrepreneurial developments in them. The Provision of internship as already discussed above has also been provided. This internship may be of a period of ten days in any academic year. Some provisions for vocational training in local and regional vocations and crafts have also been suggested. The basic idea is to promote the culture of multidisciplinary at all levels including the institution, course structure, choices of papers offered and opted, etc. As discussed towards the beginning of this paper, the financial sources have to be very sound and secure for the grand objectives of the NEP to materialise and for this the authorities at all tiers of administration need to work collectively.

In conclusion it can be said that despite the challenges the possibilities are much brighter and a collective effort at all the fronts is certainly going to make the NEP 2020 a great success in the years to come.