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# New Education Policy 2020: Opportunities and Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

*Nelson Mandela said – “Education is the most powerful weapon with which you can change the world.” Education is a categorical imperative for achieving full human potential, for developing an equitable and just society, and to foster national development. Universal high-quality education is the best way forward for maximizing our country's resources for the good of the individual, the society, the country, and the world.*

*India is the land of world-renowned higher education institutions like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and Valabhi, that set golden benchmark of multidisciplinary learning and research and hosted scholars from across backgrounds and countries.*

*Seminal knowledge has been created by the pioneering Indian scholars such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Chanakya, Panini, Patanjali, and Thiruvalluvar in diverse fields of mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science and surgery that must not only be nurtured and preserved for posterity but also researched, enhanced, and put to new uses through our education system.*

*However centuries of colonial rule devastated the nation in all senses and one of the worst affected sectors was undoubtedly, education. On the eve of independence, India was in a dismal state with a literacy rate of 16% and the female literacy rate at an even lower 8.9%. This educated lot came from mere 26 universities spread across the subcontinent. Education was then a priority for the government.*

*The Kothari Commission of 1964 was a giant leap forward in education sector as it created the famous 10+2+3 formula. This formed the basis for all the future modifications in Indian education system. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act moved ‘education’ from the State List to the Concurrent List furthering increasing the scope for its improvement.*

*The final icing on the cake is undoubtedly the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act that made education a Fundamental Right. The latest and perhaps the most revolutionary step forward to bring about systemic changes in the Indian education system is the National Educational Policy (NEP-2019), the SWOT analysis of which is attempted in this paper..*

**Keywords:** *Universal Education, Social Transformation, Inclusive Development, Learning Outcomes.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“If we teach students today, as we taught yesterday, we rob them of tomorrow.” These words of John Dewey resonate across time and clearly indicate the need for an education system to be dynamic and adaptive.<sup>2</sup> The cognition that school curriculum was focused on equipping students for past trends has been the driving force behind the changes envisioned in the National Policy of Education (NEP).

1. Demographic and economic compulsions - India will have the highest population of youth in the world over the next decade, and our ability to provide top-quality learning opportunities to them will play a role to determine the future of our country. The energy that will drive the Indian economy is going to be generated in our classrooms. It is beyond doubt that without a skilled workforce, no community can prosper and no industry will thrive. This said policy is aimed to better the landscape of employment opportunities in India.
2. Social need- Education can be considered a great leveler. Education does not discriminate. Rather, it is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality for the historically marginalized and vulnerable communities. Education will thus break ascriptive barriers.
3. Learning outcomes- Since independence, India has performed well on the quantity component as we host more than 700 recognized universities. However, quality has been lackluster specially when viewed from an international perspective.<sup>3</sup> Even the most reputed institutions like IITs and IIMs are hardly listed in the top institutions on a global scale. The gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required needs to be bridged by undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system, from early childhood care and higher education.
4. Global commitments - A lofty goal like the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030<sup>4</sup>, will require the entire education system to be reformed to support and foster quality learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Dewey, John. *Dewey on Education Selections: With an introduction and notes by Martin S Dworkin*. 1959. Teachers College Press.

<sup>3</sup> Banerjee Aparna. Three Indian Universities in top 200 in QS World Rankings, IISc ranks first for Research. *The Mint*. Jun 09, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

5. Changed global scenario- With the technological disruptions of the last century, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence creating unprecedented strides in the employability sector, the repetitive and clerical jobs that are programmable will quickly turn obsolete while the need for a skilled workforce, particularly involving mathematics, computer science, and data science, in conjunction with multidisciplinary abilities across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, will be increasingly in greater demand. The previous policy of 1986 has also turned obsolete in this regard.
6. Unprecedented environmental challenges - With climate change, increasing pollution, and depleting natural resources, there will be a sizeable shift in how we meet the world's energy, water, food, and sanitation needs, again resulting in the need for new skilled labor, particularly in biology, chemistry, physics, agriculture, climate science, and social science. The growing emergence of epidemics and pandemics (Ebola, Covid) will also call for collaborative research in infectious disease management and development of vaccines and the resultant social issues heightens the need for multidisciplinary learning. It also demands new learning models from the confines of home and in a remote mode.

Thus, a new education policy was one of the logical poll promises of Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.<sup>5</sup>

K Kasturirangan (former chairman ISRO), who is behind the drafting of the NEP, said that “transforming and creating a dynamic education system is fundamental for the progress of any country – India is no different” and that the idea “is to open our minds to excellence.” The policy is based on the pillars of “Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability” and will transform India into a vibrant knowledge hub.<sup>6</sup>

#### **(A) Salient features of the draft NEP 2020<sup>7</sup>-**

1. Universal education
2. Focus on learning outcomes and critical thinking
3. Increased Investment
4. Increased role of private sector
5. Increased role of technology
6. Special emphasis on needs of marginalized communities including – women, tribals,

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/01830/BJP\\_election\\_manif\\_1830927a.pdf](https://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/01830/BJP_election_manif_1830927a.pdf). Pg23-25.

<sup>6</sup> <https://yourstory.com/2020/11/dr-k-kasturirangan-india-new-education-policy-roadmap/amp>

<sup>7</sup> Sangno, Ralli. Key Features of NEP 2020 and how big changes in school, higher education will lead to big benefits. News18.com. Jul 31, 2020.

divyang and transgenders

7. Replaces 10+2+3 model with 5+3+3+4
8. Discontinuation of MPhil Program
9. Strong emphasis on early childhood care
10. Strong emphasis on research

**(B) Opportunities in NEP 2020:**

1. Universalization of education – The NEP aims at achieving universal education by targeting a gross enrollment ratio of 100% at primary level as well as 50% at secondary level by 2030.<sup>8</sup> It also aims at bringing back the dropouts into the mainstream / vocational education.
2. Equity and Inclusivity – The most commendable feature of the NEP is its focus on addressing the social, economic, age, gender and digital divide in education in India. It proposes to set up Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones<sup>9</sup> for the benefit of girl students as well as for trans-genders. It strongly affirms the need to make education inclusive for the disabled (divyang) children through requisite infrastructure and teaching- learning aids. The SCs, STs, minorities, students from hilly and desert regions are also being targeted by the policy. NEP talks about “lifelong learning” i.e., education for the adults, housewives, labor etc. through various government agencies.
3. Holistic education - NEP aims at a holistic and multidisciplinary education by breaking away the rigid silos of streams (Science, Humanities and Commerce) and treats at par academics, sports, curricular, co- curricular and vocational activities. It also speaks of formative and continuous assessments, including those of soft skills rather high stake summative assessments. Prof. Najma Akhtar, VC at Jamia Milia Islamia University termed the NEP as groundbreaking. The higher education in India will now be holistic and multi – disciplinary with a shared focus on science, arts and humanities.”<sup>10</sup> It also focuses on cultivating life skills like cooperation, teamwork,

<sup>8</sup>

<https://www.edumate.tv/can-nep-2020-aid-access-to-universal-education/1931/#:~:text=NEP%202020%20aims%20for%20universalization,in%20school%20education%20by%202030.&text=Emphasis%20on%20Foundational%20Literacy%20and,6%20with%20internships%20in%20schools.>

<sup>9</sup> Panwar Manjul. NEP 2020 envisages Inclusive and Equitable quality education for Rural India. Outlook India. Aug22, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Nagari Akhilesh. NEP to bring new opportunities for students in domain of Higher Education :Jamia Milia Islamia VC. The Hindustan Times. Jul 30, 2020.

empathy, resilience.

4. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) - The policy lays emphasis on the formative years of a child (3-6 years of age) when more than 85% of the cognitive development of a child's brain takes place. Adequate attention at this age can significantly alter learning outcomes in future years. The policy has included this age group under Right to Education with provision of midday meal.
5. Elevating the status of teachers - NEP tries to re-establish teachers/ educators, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our future. It aims to recruit the very best and brightest in the teaching profession at all levels, by ensuring livelihood, respect, dignity, and autonomy, while also instilling in the system basic methods of quality control and accountability. The policy also hints towards appropriate teacher training.
6. Flexibility and learner centricity – The new curriculum and pedagogy is supposed to be learner centric so that he may follow his own learning trajectory – whether in choosing a stream (allows customized bundles across science, humanities and commerce) or to go for vocational education. Flexibility is also evident from the multiple entry and exit points proposed in the 4 year undergraduate course, so that a student can pick up where he leaves, if need arises. This is achieved through creation of an Academic Bank of Credit i.e. ABC.<sup>11</sup>
7. ‘Light but tight’ regulatory framework –The policy envisions integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment.
8. Use of Technology – The most important component of the New Education Policy is Digital literacy and Computational thinking. The emphasis is to make students digitally literate and to train them in programming and coding to enhance their IT skills. NEP has been entrusted to integrate ICT in education so that the process becomes less cumbersome, fast and transparent. NEP also plans to integrate online education into the education process so that the students can maximize their educational experience.
9. Focus on Indic knowledge and Indianisation - Instilling knowledge of India and its

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<sup>11</sup> Academic Bank of Credit: how will multiple entry and exit work in colleges? News18.com. Aug 07, 2021.

varied social, cultural, and technological needs, its arts, language, and knowledge traditions, and its strong ethics in India's young people is considered critical for purposes of national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation, and integration and more importantly for the complete realization and liberation of the self. The policy encourages a rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions.

10. Focus on research – Research is a co requisite for outstanding education and development and as the ultimate harbinger of self-reliance. Presently, the patents filed by residents in India are about 43 % while the world average is 83 %. (Global Innovation Index, WIPO)<sup>12</sup> With 17% of the world's brains residing in our nation, it is a rather disturbing fact that only 2.8% of the total research output in the world originated from India. Currently, we are a nation of service providers with hardly any original work taking shape in the country
11. Increased investment - The policy aims to increase the combined expenditure of Center and States to up to 6% of GDP, currently staggering about 2-3%. Substantial investment in a strong, vibrant public education system as well as the facilitation of true philanthropic private and community participation will fulfill the aim of making India a knowledge super power.
12. Multilingualism and mother tongue- The policy aims to promote the linguistic diversity of India among students by offering 3 languages, though no language is intended to be imposed upon them. This is especially beneficial in cognitive development. The policy proposes teaching in mother tongue or regional language for primary students and up to grade 5 as far as possible.
13. Democratic policy - The MHRD, now called Ministry of Education, initiated an unprecedented collaborative, inclusive, and highly participatory consultation process from January 2015. NEP 2020 has been formulated after incorporating nearly over 2 lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks, 6000 ULBs, 676 Districts. In May 2016, 'Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy' under the Chairmanship of Late Shri T.S.R. Subramanian, Former Cabinet Secretary,

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.in/budget/news/india-climbs-35-ranks-in-global-innovation-index-but-lags-in-patents-economic-survey/articleshow/89247222.cms#:~:text=patents%3A%20Economic%20Survey-,India%20climbs%2035%20ranks%20in%20Global%20Innovation,lags%20in%20patents%3A%20Economic%20Survey&text=Despite%20climbing%2035%20notches%20in,Economic%20Survey%202021%2D22%20said>

submitted its report.<sup>13</sup>

14. **New Assessment Patterns** –The customized models of assessment given by the NEP is a welcome change. It will compel educators to make pedagogical practices more child-centric and curricula more skill-based. Such an approach will allow students to make mistakes, take risks, be creative and move away from rote learning. PISA does not test students on their memory. It attempts to assess if students can apply the knowledge they have gained and this test affirms if countries have effective and inclusive education models.
15. **Focus on critical thinking** – The policy lays emphasis on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning and learning-for-exams; creativity and critical thinking to encourage logical decision-making and innovation. It will also help to manage the menace of “coaching culture.” The new model under NEP, called STEAM, will be an upgrade over the current STEM model in higher education at a bachelor degree level, as it is focused on experiential, application-based learning and research-based internship. As part of a holistic, all-encompassing education, students will be given internship opportunities with local industry, businesses and local communities as well as research internships to improve their employability.
16. **Focus on mental health** - The NEP proposes to have counseling mechanisms for handling stress and emotional adjustments in every educational institution. This is a right move because a lot of students caught in depression are clueless as to what to do about it.
17. **National Research Foundation (NRF)** - A robust research ecosystem is needed to accelerate the pace of economic, social and academic pursuit in India. The NRF will be an institution specially set up to help channel systematic investment in research and innovation for India which has been low (0.69% of GDP) in comparison to the US (2.8%), China (2.1%) Israel (4.3%) and South Korea (4.2%)<sup>14</sup>.
18. **New Teaching Learning Methods** -Formal classroom learning is limited to books and instruction. The new policy aims to take this learning outside of the four walls of a classroom and encourage students to imbibe from the real-world. This is where the concept of ‘learning how to learn’ comes in. It encourages peer-tutoring as a voluntary and joyful activity for fellow students under the supervision of trained

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<sup>13</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1642061>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.psa.gov.in/nrf>

teachers. NEP seeks to facilitate multiple pathways to learning that will involve formal and non-formal education modes.

## II. CHALLENGES

1. The entry of private sector - The NEP aims to gradually phase out the system of affiliation to a university in 15 years and grant autonomy to colleges, which will open the doors to privatization. This has been touted as a denial of social justice.
2. Teaching in multiple languages- India has a disturbing student and teacher ratio. So introduction of mother language in academic institutions for each subject is a problem. This is simply because finding a competent teacher is a challenge. The additional challenge is to bring study material in mother language. And India has 22 active languages.
3. The English Divide - While the students in government schools will be taught in their respective languages, the students in private institutions will be introduced to English from the early classes. This will further increase the divide between English and non English speaking students as they will be introduced to the subject about seven years later than the students in private schools.
4. Unwarranted consequence of multiple exits - Under the new education system, one has to study for four years to complete their graduation. However, the question arises as to why the students will continue with the program, if he or she can get diploma in two years? If he leaves the program mid way after two years, then he could easily have two years of experience of work, which will be valuable in the long run. (Gunin Borah, Faculty of Geography in Biswanath College, Chariali)
5. Attempts to impose Hindi and Sanskrit- DMK chief MK Stalin- Stalin rejected the proposals as a “glossy coat on the old oppressive Manusmriti”. With education placed in the concurrent list, the Centre will assume the remaining rights of the states and take in its control from syllabus to university,” he added and called it an attack on the federal structure underscored by the Constitution of India.
6. Federal Principle violated - West Bengal minister Partha Chatterjee criticized the NEP, claiming it was formulated without taking the state governments into confidence.
7. Adverse impact on women’s education- Rehana Rehman, a social worker, at Navbharat Samaj Kalyan Samity, an organization that works on community development in 500 villages of western Uttar Pradesh says - a provision in the new policy boosts public-

private partnership in education — with this, there are concerns that many schools will become privatized and will no longer be free and accessible to all. This may impact girls more.<sup>15</sup>

8. Legitimizes domestication of women - “Any overemphasis on open learning for girls legitimizes domesticity. It means the girls who opt for it will have a degree, but won't be mobile.”<sup>16</sup>
9. Dilution of RTE - Rationalizing distance to school to 5-10 km is a dilution of Right to Education norms. Ambarish Rai, convener at the RTE Forum, estimated about 25% of the existing schools in India will be shut down when the policy’s consolidation provision is implemented.<sup>17</sup>
10. Legitimizes child labor -Kumar Shailabh, co-director at the Haq Child Rights Centre fears that introducing vocational training in grade 6, when children are age 11, is a calculated move linked to the 2016 child labor amendment act that said children can work in family enterprises after school hours that legitimizes child labor.
11. An over ambitious target<sup>18</sup>-
  - a. Opening universities every week is a herculean task

India today has around 1,000 universities across the country. Doubling the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035 which is one of the stated goals of the policy will mean that we must open one new university every week, for the next 15 years.

- b. A large number of schools to be opened

The NEP 2020 intends to bring 2 crore children who are currently not in schools, back into the school system. Accomplishing this over 15 years, requires the setting up of around 50 schools every week. It also means appointing at least 50 headmasters every single week, and at least 200-300 teachers every single week on an ongoing basis.

- c. Funding is a big challenge in the Covid era

The NEP 2020 envisages an increase in education spending from 4.6% to 6% of GDP, which amounts to around INR 2.5 lakh crores per year. What makes things tricky is that this policy comes into being when the economy has been battered by Covid-19 related lockdowns, government tax collections are abysmally low, and the fiscal deficit was high even pre-Covid.

<sup>15</sup> Bhatt, Neha. Examining India’s New Education Policy through a gender lens. Devex.com. Sep 02, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Jha Jyotsna. Director of Center for Budget and Policy Studies. “India cannot afford the NEP”. Idronline.org.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZngqEUvmpQ>

<sup>18</sup> Vishwanathan Kapil. An Over ambitious Target. India Today web Desk. Aug 14, 2020.

Government and budgetary priorities are claimed by the more urgent but equally important needs of healthcare and economic recovery.

12. Digital connectivity - We require internet penetration in remote areas because e-learning is the way forward, as witnessed during the pandemic. Digital infrastructure for this purpose will include digital classrooms, expertise-driven online teaching models, AR/VR technologies to overcome gaps in physical teaching and lab infrastructure, uniform assessment schemes across schools, career counselling sessions and teacher training to become adept at new-age technologies. This will continue to be a major challenge in the next decade.
13. Rigorous training of teachers - Education providers of today are also the products of the mediocre education system of yesterday, we need to first put in place a system that will equip knowledge facilitators to understand the nuances of this novel system.
14. Cultural Change - The fundamental pedagogical structures of how we organize education have proved to be deeply resistant to change. This is one of the reasons that led to the failure and withdrawal of the continuous comprehensive evaluation (CCE) initiative.
15. Flexibility at school to be carried into universities- With increased flexibility across arts and humanities, their choices have increased manifold. However, changes at this level will have to dovetail into decisions and admission processes at the university level, else the NEP will be an exercise in futility.

### **III. SUGGESTIONS**

1. Stakeholder Participation - If we want the NEP to succeed, we have to be careful to disrupt established norms. Every stakeholder at the state, district, sub-district, and block level has to take ownership of the NEP. Principals have to be trained. Many of them — even in the urban areas — do not have the skills required for such changes. It is important to plan the mapping of resources and skillsets of teachers before the policy is actually rolled out. Standalone workshops will not suffice. Consistent inter and intra school training is needed.
2. Pilot Programs - The CBSE is the country's most progressive board. It can start with pilot programs to ensure the efficacy of this policy. It has been involved in writing manuals and had conducted programs and launched initiatives on competency-based education, joyful and experiential learning, art education, school quality assessments

and a variety of other innovative pedagogies.

3. Trickle down Model -The Board can train master instructors, who, in turn, can train principals and teachers. As such, scalable and sustainable model can be created. Transformation will take place only if we collaborate and create communities of teacher training and provide them with real-time feedback on their levels of readiness.<sup>19</sup>
4. Raising the bar as well as stake for teachers- We need to hire the very best and brightest to enter the teaching profession at all levels. Work also needs to be done in removing personal and professional barriers of working in remote, inaccessible locations which is crucial for preparing this workforce and also for making the NEP successful. We also need to infuse more honor for people in teaching profession.
5. Cultural Shift- The current education system is a hangover of the British and Industrial age. The change in mindset will involve at least two or more generation of parents, teachers and educators. The corporate world also will need to change its recruitment and grooming policies. There will be several challenges in changing this mindset. However, it can be done with soft touch approach by the government.
6. Bottom-up approach - As Indians, we are socially programmed to accept top-down approach in all areas of life. This social and educational transformation is only possible with a bottom-up grass-root level intervention. A transformation is needed from ‘what to think’ to ‘how to think’.
7. Compulsory Value Education – Looking at the increasing criminalization in society, adequate emphasis needs to be put on value education / moral education right from the early age. This can be achieved through incorporating texts and stories from our epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata and heroic figures like Chhatrapati Shivaji.
8. Emphasis on Yoga- India is known as the ancient civilization which prospered due to its timeless heritage. We need to promote yoga, not as relict of the past but as a scientific way of life.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

“We are a bridge from a grand past to a glorious future”, said Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.

It is high time that we upgraded our education system to suit the needs of present times and the upcoming years. It is only through disruptive changes, and not incremental, that we can

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<sup>19</sup> Watal, Ameeta Mulla. Greatest Challenge for successful rollout of new education policy is teacher training. *The Indian Express*. Aug 18, 2020.

transform into knowledge based society. There needs to be utmost focus on quality education along with education for all so that India in 2047, emerges as the real 'vishwaguru'.

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