

From Tradition to Transformation: A Comparative Study of India's Education Policies Over Time

Mr. Apurba Pal¹, Dr. Mohan D. Kadwe², Dr. Surendra R. Tiwari³, Dr. V. B. Datarkar⁴

Director of Physical Education, Dr. M. K. Umathe College, Nagpur¹

Associate Professor, Jyotiba College of Physical Education, Nagpur²

Professor, Jyotiba College of Physical Education, Nagpur³

Principal, Jyotiba College of Physical Education, Nagpur⁴

Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur

Abstract: *The evolution of Indian education policy, spanning from the Kothari Commission to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, signifies a continuous endeavor to meet societal needs and address educational challenges. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) advocated for free education and social justice. NPE 1968 introduced the 10+2+3 system, emphasizing equal opportunities. NPE 1986 stressed values and vocational education. NCF 2005 aimed for a burden-free, holistic curriculum. RTE Act 2009 ensured free and compulsory education. NEP 2020 focuses on inclusive, quality education with a 5+3+3+4 structure, multilingualism, and vocational training. This progression underscores India's commitment to enhancing its education system in response to a dynamic global landscape.*

Keywords: Tradition, Transformation, Comparative Study, India, Education Policies, Over Time, Educational Transformation, Policy Evolution

I. INTRODUCTION

India's educational landscape has witnessed a dynamic transformation over the decades, propelled by a series of influential policy interventions. This research paper endeavors to provide a thorough examination of key milestones in India's educational policy framework, tracing the trajectory from the seminal Kothari Commission to the transformative National Education Policy 2020.

The Kothari Commission, instituted in 1964, marked a turning point in the Indian education system. Its recommendations aimed at overhauling the existing structure and fostering a holistic approach to education. The National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1968 emerged as a blueprint for educational development, emphasizing equal access and opportunities for all.

Building on the foundation laid by the NPE 1968, the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986 sought to address contemporary challenges and redefine the objectives of education. This period marked a significant shift toward quality enhancement and the integration of technology in education.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) represented another crucial phase, shaping the content and delivery of education in the country. By advocating a learner-centric approach, NCF 2005 emphasized critical thinking, creativity, and a holistic understanding of subjects.

In 2009, the enactment of the Right to Education Act (RTE Act 2009) underscored the commitment to providing free and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14, a fundamental step toward achieving universal elementary education.

The culmination of these historical developments came in 2020 with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020). NEP 2020 envisions a comprehensive overhaul of the education system, aligning it with the demands of the 21st century. Emphasizing flexibility, multidisciplinary, and a focus on research and innovation, NEP 2020 sets the stage for a paradigm shift in the way education is conceptualized and delivered in India.

This research paper aims to critically analyze the evolution of these key educational policies, examining their objectives, impact, and the broader societal context within which they unfolded. By doing so, we seek to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between policy decisions and the educational landscape in India.

Objectives:

- To learn about Kothari Commission
- To learn about National Policy of Education (NPE) 1968
- To learn about National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986
- To learn about National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005)
- To learn about Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE Act 2009)
- To learn about National Education Policy 2020

Kothari Commission:

The Kothari Commission, officially known as the National Education Commission, was established by the Government of India in 1964-1966 to comprehensively assess and recommend changes to the educational system. Chaired by Dr. Daulat Singh Kothari, the commission presented its report titled "Education and National Development" on June 29, 1966. The key objectives of the commission were to evaluate the existing educational system and propose reforms for academic reconstruction.

Objectives of the Kothari Commission (1964-66)

- To conduct a thorough evaluation of the educational system in order to launch a fresh, more focused attempt for academic reconstruction.
- Creating a curriculum and policies that would advance education in all its forms and phases and advising the Indian government on the matter.

Key Recommendations of the Kothari Commission:

1. Free and Compulsory Education: The commission advocated for free and compulsory education for children between the ages of six and fourteen.
2. Languages: It recommended the implementation of a three-language formula by state governments. This aimed to promote the use of a Southern state language in Hindi-speaking states and, in non-Hindi-speaking states, encourage Hindi along with English and a regional language.
3. Language Advancement: The commission suggested the promotion of both international languages, particularly English, and regional languages like Sanskrit.
4. Teacher Welfare: The Kothari Commission emphasized providing favorable and sufficient working conditions for teachers, along with the academic freedom needed for research and dissemination of knowledge.
5. Social Justice: Prioritizing social justice, the commission recommended special attention to the education of girls, members of underprivileged classes, tribal communities, and children with physical and mental disabilities.
6. Science and Math Education: Recognizing the importance of science and mathematics for national development, the commission proposed their inclusion in the curriculum.
7. University Education: The commission provided recommendations to enhance university education, focusing on postgraduate research and training. It emphasized the need for adequate funding, well-equipped libraries, and laboratories.

In summary, the Kothari Commission played a significant role in shaping the educational landscape in India by addressing issues related to access, language, teacher welfare, social justice, and the importance of science and mathematics education. Its recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive and holistic education system in the country.

National Policy of Education (NPE) 1968:

1. Directive Principle Under Article 45:
 - Aimed at fulfilling the directive principle of the Indian Constitution (Article 45) that advocated for free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14.
 - Focused on eliminating barriers to quality education across the nation.
2. Equal Opportunities and Inclusive Education:
 - Vision to create equal opportunities for citizens across the nation.
 - Special emphasis on improving educational facilities for handicapped children, students from rural, backward, or tribal areas, and the education of the girl child.
3. Three-Language Formula:
 - Implementation of the 'three-language formula' as per Article 351 of the constitution, encouraging the development of Hindi across the country.
4. Facilities for Secondary and University Level Education:
 - Recognition of the need to increase facilities for secondary education, especially in underserved areas.
 - Emphasis on developing vocational education to enhance employment opportunities.
 - Improvement of facilities in various fields, including agriculture, trade, medicine, arts, crafts, commerce, and home management.
 - Establishment of new universities.
5. Adult Education:
 - Promotion of functional literacy within the masses.
 - Targeted education for employees in industries through literacy campaigns.
 - Emphasis on training youth for improved self-employment opportunities.
6. Teacher Training and Professional Competence:
 - Focus on uplifting the condition of teachers and promoting their academic freedom.
 - Emphasis on improving emoluments and service conditions for teachers.
 - Attention to the training and education of teachers.
7. Educational System Restructuring:
 - Implementation of a new structure for the educational system based on the recommendations of the Education Commission.
 - Introduction of a uniform schooling pattern (10+2+3) to retain students within the mainstream education system.

Challenges and Criticisms:

- Despite its visionary aims, NPE 1968 faced challenges in achieving universal education goals.
- It struggled with a shortage of funds, hindering its ability to reach the targeted expenditure level of 6% of the national income.

Legacy and Impact:

- NPE 1968 played a crucial role in standardizing education in India and creating a structured framework.
- Instrumental in introducing the 10+2+3 schooling pattern and promoting the use of the mother tongue in education.

National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986:

1. Constitutional Principles:
 - Derives inspiration from democratic and secular values enshrined in the Indian constitution.
2. Access to Education:
 - Aims for a national system of education providing equal access to quality education for all, irrespective of caste, creed, location, or gender.
 - Government-funded programs and efforts towards the common school system.

3. Common Education Structure:

- Advocates a common educational structure of 10+2+3, with efforts to move towards an elementary system of 5 years of primary, 3 years of upper primary, and 2 years of high school education.

4. National Curriculum Framework:

- Recommends a national curriculum framework with a common core, including the history of India's freedom movement, constitutional obligations, and other components for nurturing national identity.

5. Emphasis on Learning:

- Encourages teachers to create environments where students learn through their own creativity.

6. Vocationalization of Education:

- Gives importance to the rationalization of education, emphasizing vocational courses to minimize unemployment.

7. Importance of Moral Values:

- Stresses the importance of inculcating moral values in students for bringing about desirable changes in society.

8. Reforms in the Examination System:

- Suggests grading instead of divisions to reduce frustration and anxiety.

- Recommends periodical tests and holds teachers responsible for evaluating their students.

9. Education for the Weaker Sections:

- Emphasizes education for SC/ST/differently-abled persons and girls with reservations in various educational institutions.

10. Continual Primary School:

- Advocates for primary schools to function throughout the year with at least two classrooms and two teachers, one of whom should be a woman.

11. Operational Blackboard:

- Introduces the concept of an operational blackboard, ensuring minimum facilities in primary schools with the cooperation of voluntary organizations and local bodies.

12. All India Educational Service:

- Emphasizes the need for an All India Educational Service to improve educational administration and reduce regionalism.

13. Navodaya Schools:

- Recommends the establishment of Navodaya Schools, free residential schools admitting students to class VI based on admission tests, with a focus on promoting national integration.

14. New Educational Institutions:

- Proposes the creation of District Institute of Education Training (DIET) and District Board Education (DBE) to survey educational needs and inform concerned education officers.

15. Modernization of Education:

- Advocates the use of computer education, correspondence courses, television, radio, satellite, and video-assisted learning in expanding literacy and modernizing education.

16. Education on Women's Equality:

- Utilizes education as an agent for basic changes in the status of women, emphasizing their participation in vocational-technical and professional education.

- Prioritizes removing women's illiteracy through special support services.

National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005):

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) is the fourth such framework in India, published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). It was developed with the aim of modernizing the education system, focusing on the concept of "Learning without burden." The framework provides a structure for teachers and schools to plan experiences for children and conceptualizes the curriculum as a means to articulate required experiences.

Principles:

1. Connecting Knowledge to Life:
 - The curriculum should connect knowledge to life outside the school.
 - Learning should be shifted away from rote methods, and the curriculum should be enriched to provide overall development rather than being textbook-centric.
2. Guiding Principles:
 - Shift from rote learning to meaningful learning experiences.
 - Enrich the curriculum to promote overall development.
 - Make examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life.
 - Nurture an identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity.

Learning & Knowledge:

1. Holistic Development:
 - The curriculum aims to make students feel valued, heard, and safe, promoting their physical, mental, and social growth.
2. Inclusive Education:
 - Prioritizes inclusive education and curriculum flexibility for all students, including those with impairments.
3. Constructive Learning:
 - Encourages challenges, creative possibilities, and active engagement.
 - Interaction with peers, teachers, and elderly persons is encouraged for richer learning possibilities.
4. Strong Foundations:
 - Primary and middle school levels should allow students to explore and develop logical thinking, concepts, language, knowledge, investigation, and validation techniques.

Curricular Areas, School Stages & Assessment:

1. Language:
 - Utilize multilingual classrooms as a resource.
 - Respect the child's home language(s) and promote multilingual communication.
2. Mathematics:
 - Emphasizes an ambitious, coherent curriculum that teaches important principles.
 - Aims to make mathematics enjoyable and encourages understanding beyond formulas.
3. Computer:
 - Introduction of computers to develop explanatory reasoning and higher-order skills.
 - Promotes flexible models of curriculum transaction and individual learning styles.
4. Science:
 - Emphasizes nurturing curiosity, hands-on activities, and engagement with the environment at various stages.
 - Science should be introduced as a separate discipline at the higher secondary stage.
5. Social Science:
 - Integrates natural and social environments into languages and mathematics.
 - Introduces Environmental Studies (EVS) to raise awareness about environmental and social issues.
6. Art Education:
 - Urges the integration of arts into the curriculum to develop skills and abilities.
 - Aims to introduce students to the rich artistic traditions of the country.
7. Health & Physical Education:
 - Recognizes the subject's importance for overall development.
 - Advocates for it to be a compulsory subject from primary to higher secondary stages.
8. Work & Education:
 - Work-related education integrated into the curriculum to develop skills and positive attitudes.
 - Aims to involve children in production or service-oriented activities.

9. Peace Education:

- Focuses on ethical development, values, and attitudes for living in harmony with oneself and others.
- Encourages respect for human rights, justice, tolerance, cooperation, and non-violent conflict resolution.

10. Learning Habitat:

- Infuses environmental education into different disciplines to address significant concerns.
- Encourages activities that develop an understanding of and care for the habitat.

11. Assessment & Evaluation:

- Advocates for a good evaluation system integrated into the learning process.

12. School & Classroom Environment:

- Stresses the importance of a favorable physical environment, equality, and justice in schools.
- Encourages a policy of inclusion for differently-abled and marginalized students.

13. Systemic Reforms:

- Acknowledges the need for effective systemic reforms, including teacher preparation, monitoring, and decentralization, to support the curriculum.

Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE Act 2009):

The Right to Education Act 2009, also known as the RTE Act 2009, was enacted by the Indian Parliament on August 4, 2009, and came into effect on April 1, 2010. It establishes the right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years in India under Article 21 (A) of the Indian Constitution. The Act sets out to address educational disparities and improve the quality of education in the country.

Objectives:

1. Compulsory and Free Education:

- The Act mandates that the government must provide free and compulsory basic education to all children up to class 8 in nearby local schools.
- No child is required to pay fees or other costs hindering their access to primary education.

2. Benchmarks and Standards:

- The Act establishes standards and benchmarks related to Pupil-Teacher Ratios, classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities, school-working days, and more.
- These standards are set to ensure a minimum quality of education in every elementary school in India.

3. Special Provisions:

- The Act includes provisions for admitting out-of-school children to age-appropriate courses and providing special training to bring them up to age-appropriate learning levels.

4. Quality of Teachers:

- The Act ensures the appointment of appropriately trained teachers with the necessary qualifications, maintaining a balanced Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

5. Zero Tolerance against Discrimination and Harassment:

- Prohibits all forms of physical punishment, mental harassment, and discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, and other factors.
- Forbids practices such as screening methods for admission, capitation fees, private tuition centers, and functioning of unrecognized schools.

6. Non-detention Policy:

- The Act states that no child can be held back or expelled from school until Class 8.
- Introduces the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system to assess and address students' learning gaps effectively.

7. School Management Committees (SMCs):

- Mandates the formation of School Management Committees comprising headteachers, elected representatives, parents, and community members.
- Empowers SMCs to monitor school functioning and prepare school improvement plans.

8. Justiciable and Grievance Redressal Mechanism:

- The Act is justiciable, backed by a Grievance Redressal mechanism that allows individuals to take action against non-compliance.

9. Reservation in Private Schools:

- Private schools are required to reserve 25% of their seats for socially disadvantaged and economically weaker sections.

10. Girls' Education:

- Highlights the need for educating girls and addresses challenges such as dropout rates due to familial responsibilities and safety concerns.

- Aims to provide comprehensive support, including professional courses, to make girls economically independent.

11. Safety Measures:

- Emphasizes the safety and security of students, particularly girls, by implementing guidelines for schools to ensure a secure learning environment.

- Encourages awareness programs on menstrual hygiene and zero tolerance for any form of sexual abuse.

Challenges and Concerns:

- Despite the enactment of the RTE Act 2009, concerns persist, with less than 10% of schools reported to comply with all its standards and benchmarks.

- The challenges include issues related to the privatization of education and longstanding educational inequalities in the country.

- Implementation of the Act remains a significant challenge, and ongoing efforts are needed to ensure its effective execution nationwide.

National Education Policy 2020:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, announced on July 29, 2020, proposes comprehensive reforms in school education, higher education, and technical education. Key features of NEP 2020 include:

1. Universal Access and Quality Education:

- Ensuring universal access to education from pre-primary to Grade 12.

- Focus on quality early childhood care and education for children aged 3-6 years.

2. New Curricular and Pedagogical Structure:

- Introduction of a new structure: 5+3+3+4, replacing the conventional 10+2 system.

- No rigid separations between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, or vocational and academic streams.

3. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:

- Establishment of the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

4. Multilingualism and Medium of Instruction:

- Emphasis on promoting multilingualism and Indian languages.

- Home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5.

5. Assessment Reforms:

- Board exams on up to two occasions during a school year, with one main examination and an opportunity for improvement.

- Introduction of the National Assessment Centre - PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development).

6. Equitable and Inclusive Education:

- Special emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

- Introduction of a separate Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.

7. Teacher Recruitment and Performance:

- Robust and transparent processes for the recruitment of teachers.

- Merit-based performance evaluations for teachers.

8. School Complexes and Clusters:
 - Ensuring availability of resources through school complexes and clusters.
 - Setting up of State School Standards Authority (SSSA).
9. Vocational Education:
 - Exposure of vocational education in school and higher education systems.
10. Higher Education Reforms:
 - Increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50%.
 - Holistic and multidisciplinary education with multiple entry/exit options.
11. National Testing Agency (NTA):
 - NTA to offer a Common Entrance Exam for admission to Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).
12. Academic Bank of Credit:
 - Establishment of the Academic Bank of Credit.
13. Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs):
 - Setting up of MERUs to promote multidisciplinary education.
14. National Research Foundation (NRF):
 - Establishment of NRF for research promotion.
15. 'Light but Tight' Regulation:
 - Introduction of a single overarching body - Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) - for the promotion of the higher education sector.
16. Open and Distance Learning:
 - Expansion of open and distance learning to increase GER.
17. Internationalization of Education:
 - Emphasis on internationalization of education.
18. Professional Education Integration:
 - Professional education integrated into the higher education system.
19. Teacher Education:
 - Introduction of a 4-year integrated stage-specific, subject-specific Bachelor of Education.
20. National Mission for Mentoring:
 - Establishment of a National Mission for Mentoring.
21. National Educational Technology Forum (NETF):
 - Creation of NETF for the integration of technology into education.
22. Literacy Targets:
 - Aim to achieve 100% youth and adult literacy.
23. Combatting Commercialization:
 - Multiple mechanisms to combat and stop the commercialization of higher education.
24. Public Investment in Education:
 - Collaboration between the Centre and States to increase public investment in the education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest.
25. Coordination and Quality Focus:
 - Strengthening the Central Advisory Board of Education to ensure coordination and an overall focus on quality education.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive approach, relying on secondary data collected from various sources such as Indian government websites, magazines, journals, and other publications. The acquired data underwent thorough evaluation and analysis to derive inferences and draw conclusions.

III. CONCLUSION

The Kothari Commission, appointed in 1964, played a pivotal role in shaping India's educational landscape by providing comprehensive recommendations to revamp the education system. The National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1968 marked a significant milestone, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach and equal educational opportunities for all.

Building upon the NPE 1968, the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986 aimed at addressing emerging challenges and fostering a more inclusive and flexible education system. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) further refined the curriculum, focusing on a learner-centric approach and promoting critical thinking and creativity.

The Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE Act 2009) was a landmark legislation that mandated free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14, contributing to the realization of universal elementary education in India. In 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) was introduced, marking a paradigm shift by emphasizing a multidisciplinary approach, promoting research and innovation, and aligning education with the evolving needs of the 21st century.

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