National Education Policy (NEP 2020): An Equitable and Inclusive Quality Education for all in Question

Dr. Fatima S. Shaikh[1] and Dr. Shashikala Prajapati[2]
HOD, Department of English[1] and Department of Zoology[2]
KLE Society's Science & Commerce College, Kalamboli, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Abstract: *On the global economic front, India has emerged as one of the most powerful nations. India has to train a generation of young people who are educated and progressive in attitude and practise in order to build a more sustainable social, economic, and political system. This research paper emphasises the need and importance of empowering a nation on a global scale by establishing and implementing a well-thought-out and well-executed national education policy. Every country needs a robust education strategy at the school and college levels to build a long-term social, economic, and political foundation. A country's cultural and traditional structure, as well as the many periods of a learner's life cycle at school and college, should all be taken into account. The Indian government unveiled its education policy (NEP 2020) in 2020, with the goal of converting India into a nation that is regarded as an equitable and robust knowledge society that provides high-quality education to all. The 1986 National Policy on Education has been replaced by this new policy. Every Indian citizen applauded this start toward transforming India into a modern, progressive, and equal nation by 2040. But whether or not this will actually happen is a big question. This paper will concentrate on the difficulties that may arise as a result of NEP's efforts to become a more inclusive and equitable education provider.*

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), Empowering, Quality Education, Inclusiveness, Equitable, Progressive

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the most powerful tool for promoting social justice and equality in a larger society. Education for all, inclusive and equitable, is a crucial component of building an inclusive and equitable society in which every person has the opportunity to dream, thrive, and contribute to the nation. The Indian education system must be designed to benefit students so that no child is denied the opportunity to learn and thrive as a result of their birth or status. Bridging the socioeconomic category disparities in school education access, participation, and learning outcomes will continue to be a fundamental priority of all education sector development programmes, according to NEP 2020.

The NEP understands that education is critical for realising one's full potential, creating a more equal and just society, and advancing national development. By 2030, the global education development strategy aims to "provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," as stated in Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which India adopted in 2015. To fulfil all of the important targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the entire educational system will need to be restructured to support and nurture learning. To make education more immersive, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, adaptable, and entertaining, pedagogy must evolve. In addition to science and mathematics, the curriculum should incorporate basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values to develop all aspects and skills of learners and make education more well-rounded, helpful, and rewarding. Character must be developed through education, which enables students to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring while also preparing them for gainful, meaningful jobs. From early childhood care and education to higher education, the gap between existing learning results and what is expected must be addressed by

fundamental reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system. The goal must be for India to develop a world-class education system by 2040, with equitable access to high-quality education for all students, regardless of social or economic status. This National Education Policy 2020 is the country's first education policy of the twenty-first century, with the goal of addressing the country's many expanding developmental imperatives. This Policy proposes that all aspects of the educational structure, including regulation and governance, be revised and revamped in order to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, while preserving India's traditions and value systems. The new education policy must ensure that all kids, regardless of where they live, have access to quality education. Education is the best weapon for attaining economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality because it is a tremendous leveller. Initiatives must be put in place to ensure that, despite their inherent disadvantages, all students from such groups have access to a variety of targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system. For the purposes of national pride, self-confidence, self-knowledge, cooperation, and integration, instilling knowledge of India and its diverse social, cultural, and technological needs, its inimitable artistic, language, and knowledge traditions, and its strong ethics in India's young people is considered critical. [1]

The vision of the National Education Policy 2020 is

National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India-centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all.

Changing Perspectives in Education under NEP 2020
A. School Education:

The existing 10+2 education system will be replaced by a new 5+3+3+4 structure that will correlate to the ages of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years. The new system will include 12 years of formal education and three years of Anganwadi/pre-school education. By 2030, the NEP 2020 aspires to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 100% in school education. Internships will begin in Class 6 for Vocational Education. Up to at least Grade 5, teaching should be done in the mother tongue/regional language. By 2030, a four-year B.Ed. degree will be the minimum required for teaching. [2]

B. Higher Education

The goal of NEP 2020 is to increase GER in higher education from 26.3 percent in 2018 to 50 percent by 2035. Its goal is to make the curriculum more adaptable by using an interdisciplinary approach that allows for multiple exit points. Single discipline institutions, as well as multidisciplinary universities of education and research (MERUs) and a National Research Foundation, will be founded under the policy. The formation of India's Higher Education Commission (HECI) for all higher education will constitute a paradigm change. Higher education has been heavily emphasised in terms of digitalization and open learning methods in order to enhance GER. To summarise, NEP provides Choice, Chance, and Change, but we will have to wait and see how it is executed. [3]

C. Other Key Areas of Focus

As a result, a focus on professional education becomes a necessary component of the broader higher education system. Agricultural universities, legal universities, health science universities, technical universities, and other stand-alone institutions should strive to become multidisciplinary institutions that provide comprehensive and multidisciplinary education. By 2030, all schools that provide professional or general education will strive to organically evolve into institutions/clusters that provide both in a fluid and integrated manner.

II. MAKING IT HAPPEN

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 focuses on developing and empowering the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), which will have a strong mission and a venue to examine educational and cultural growth. In close coordination with the MHRD and the respective apex organisations of States, the rebuilt and revitalised CABE will be

responsible for continuously formulating, expressing, evaluating, and amending the country's educational vision. It will also build and assess institutional frameworks that will aid in the realisation of this objective. To refocus attention on education and learning, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) should be renamed the Ministry of Education (MoE). NEP 2020 pledges to provide all people with access to high-quality, low-cost education. The Centre and the States will collaborate to boost public investment in education to reach 6% of GDP as soon as possible.

2.1 Issues of Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

While the Indian education system and subsequent government policies have made steady progress in closing gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education, large disparities still exist, particularly at the secondary level, especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups who have historically been underrepresented in education. Gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions can all be used to categorise Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor). While school enrollment drops continuously from Grade 1 to Grade 12, the decline is far more pronounced for each of these SEDGs, with even bigger declines for female students within each of these SEDGs, and typically steeper in higher education. The following sub-sections provide a quick overview of the SEDGs that pertain to socio-cultural identities:

1. According to U-DISE data from 2016-17, 19.6% of primary school students are from Scheduled Castes, however this number lowers to 17.3% in secondary school. Enrollment declines significantly for Scheduled Tribes students (10.6 percent to 6.8%) and differently abled students (1.1 percent to 0.25 percent), with far larger drops for female students in each of these categories. Enrollment in higher education has plummeted even more dramatically.

2. The Scheduled Castes' enrolment and retention rates have been negatively impacted by a number of factors, including a lack of access to good schools, poverty, social mores and customs, and language. Closing the inequalities in access, engagement, and learning outcomes for children from Scheduled Castes would be one of the main goals. Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who have been historically labelled as socially and educationally backward, deserve special care as well.

3. Tribal groups and children from Scheduled Tribes face a number of difficulties due to historical and geographical factors. Children from tribal cultures frequently perceive their school education as culturally and academically irrelevant and alien to their lives. While there are currently and in the future numerous programmatic attempts to uplift children from tribal communities, unique methods must be devised to ensure that tribal children benefit from these interventions.

4. Minorities are underrepresented in both secondary and postsecondary education. The Policy recognises the importance of measures that promote the education of children from all minority communities, especially those who are underrepresented in school.

2.2 Approaches of NEP 2020 towards an Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education for all:

NEP 2020 emphasises the need of developing methods to promote inclusiveness and equal access to high-quality education for everyone through the following approaches:

1. The policy aims to provide Children With Special Needs (CWSN) or Divyang with the same access to a quality education as any other child.

2. Developing new strategies to close gaps in school education between underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in terms of early childhood education, fundamental reading and numeracy, access, enrolment, and attendance.

3. In addition, a number of successful policies and schemes have significantly increased SEDG participation in the schooling system in certain areas, such as targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to encourage

parents to send their children to school, bicycles for transportation, and so on. These positive policies and programmes must be expanded throughout the country.

4. It will also be crucial for the policy to consider studies on which policies are most effective for certain SEDGs. Giving bicycles and organising cycling and walking groups to provide access to school, for example, has been shown to be very beneficial in increasing female student participation - even over shorter distances - due to the safety and convenience they provide to parents.

5. One-on-one teachers and tutors, peer tutoring, open schooling, correct infrastructure, and appropriate technological interventions to give access can be very beneficial for certain children with impairments. Schools that provide high-quality early childhood education assist children from low-income families the most.

6. Meanwhile, it's been shown that counsellors and/or well-trained social workers who work with and interact with students, parents, schools, and instructors to improve attendance and learning outcomes are particularly beneficial to children in urban disadvantaged communities.

7. The data shows that certain geographic areas have considerably larger numbers of SEDGs than others. Aspirational Districts are geographical locations that require special interventions to help them achieve their educational goals. As a result, it is proposed that regions of the country with large populations from educationally disadvantaged SEDGs be designated as Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all schemes and policies are fully implemented through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly transform their educational landscape.

8. It's worth noting that women make up nearly half of all underrepresented groups, accounting for roughly half of all SEDGs. Unfortunately, the isolation and injustice experienced by women in these SEDGs is exacerbated. The plan also emphasises women's unique and crucial role in society and in shaping social norms; as a result, providing high-quality education to girls is the most effective way to boost education levels for these SEDGs in current and future generations.

9. In addition, the Indian government will create a "Gender-Inclusion Fund" to help states support and scale up community-based interventions that address local context-specific barriers to female and transgender children's access to and participation in education. This Policy's ultimate purpose is to eliminate any remaining gaps in access to education (including vocational education) for children of any gender or other socioeconomically disadvantaged group.

10. Free boarding facilities, matching the standard of JawaharNavodayaVidyalayas, will be built in school locations where students may have to travel a long distance, especially for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, with suitable arrangements for the safety of all children, especially girls.

11. The inclusion and equal involvement of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system would be given top priority. Children with disabilities will be able to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the Foundational Stage to higher education.

12. According to the RPWD Act of 2016, children with physical disabilities have the option of attending regular or special school. Resource Centers will serve the rehabilitation and educational needs of students with severe or multiple disabilities, as well as supporting parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for such students, in partnership with special educators. Home-based education will continue to be an option for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to attend school.

13. The majority of students in classrooms have significant learning disabilities and require ongoing support in the form of good teachers and appropriate technology that allows and enables children to work at their own pace, flexible curriculum that utilises each child's abilities, and the creation of an environment for appropriate evaluation and certification are all examples of specific actions.

14. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Defense, state governments may be urged to open NCC wings in their secondary and higher secondary schools, particularly in tribally dominated areas. This will allow students' innate ability and unique potential to be tapped, allowing them to pursue a successful career in the military.

15. All scholarships, other opportunities, and programmes available to SEDG students will be organised and publicised by a single agency and website, guaranteeing that all students are aware of, and may apply in an easy manner on such a "single window system" as per eligibility.

16. All of the policies and practises outlined above are necessary but insufficient to achieve full inclusion and equity for all of the SEDGs. A shift in the culture of the institution is also required. Teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students will all be educated on the needs of all children, as well as the ideals of inclusion and equity, as well as the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons.

17. As a result of this new school culture, which will be implemented by instructors, professional social workers, and counsellors, as well as corresponding changes to the school curriculum to make it more inclusive, students will be sensitised. Respect for all people, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, nonviolence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity will all be part of the school curriculum from the beginning. There will be no biases or stereotypes in the school curriculum, and more material will be introduced that is relevant and relatable to all groups.

2.3 The Inclusiveness and Equitable Education for all in Question

Despite governments' efforts to create a society with inclusive and fair educational opportunities for all, vast segments of the population continue to be denied access to even the most basic schooling. In rural-urban communities, there is a great deal of opportunity gap depending on gender and socio-economic factors. Many areas of Indian culture still lack technology, preventing students from using technology during times of crisis when classes are moved online. A survey of students in schools and universities was performed to see whether NEP 2020 could indeed bring education to everyone, regardless of caste, creed, gender, socioeconomic background, geographic location, handicap, affordability, technology, and so on. To find out where NEP stands in providing an inclusive and equitable quality education for all, a questionnaire was distributed among students and working professionals in academics with a varied number of questions based on variants such as gender, disability, socio-economic factor, geographical variant, and so on. More than 500 people replied to the survey, which asked whether the government is including each and every citizen in providing high-quality education, based on the characteristics shown in the table below. The responders had to select one of three options: yes, no, or neutral. The following is a summary of the response:

Factors affecting the provision of equitable and inclusive quality education for all	% of response in "Yes"	% of response in "No"	Neutral
Gender	22.10	76.15	1.75
Caste	19.29	77.91	2.80
Socio-economic	27.01	70.54	2.45
Geographical Area	23.15	74.75	2.10
Disability	35.43	62.47	2.10
Affordability	49.82	47.03	3.15
Technology and its usage	24.56	72.64	2.80
Attitude towards education	51.22	43.18	5.6

2.4 Graphical Representation of the above table
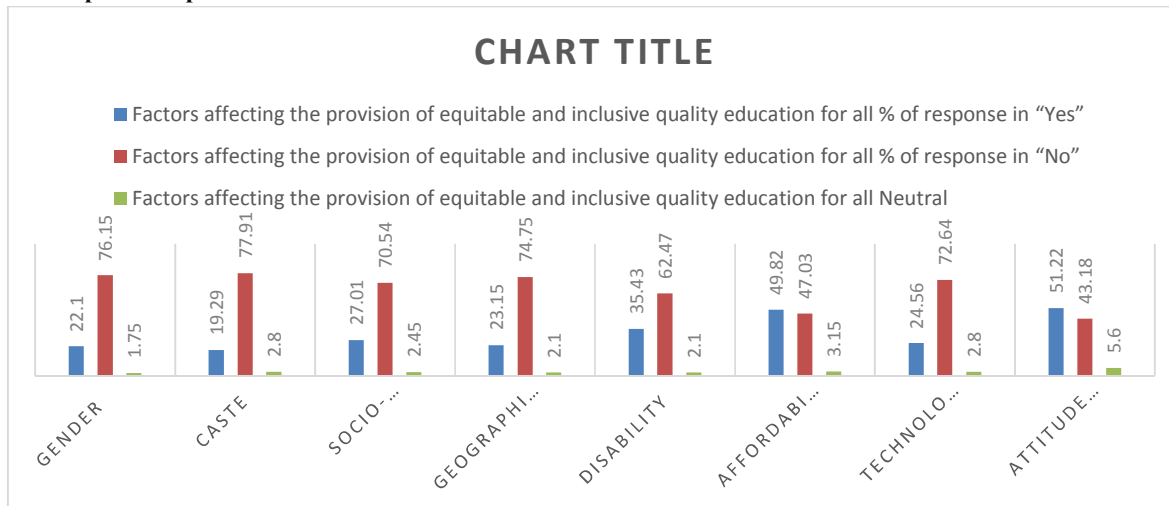
III. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The question is whether the Indian government will be able to include every segment of the population in the education system and make opportunities egalitarian by 2040. Students and professionals were sent a questionnaire that included questions about caste, gender, affordability, parents' attitudes toward education, society, and so on, with respondents being asked to answer Yes, No, or Neutral. On variables such as affordability and attitude, the response is highest when compared to No. Respondents believe that these are the two factors that have the greatest impact on the inclusiveness and equitability of quality education for all, as opposed to other factors. Respondents believe that the inclusiveness and equitability of quality education for all variables listed in the above table (except affordability and attitude) has the least impact, which is why the response in No is the lowest and the response in Yes is the highest. Few respondents gave a neutral response, indicating that they are unsure if the factors influence or do not influence the problem statement of the paper in question.

IV. CONCLUSION

NEP 2020 is regarded as a positive step forward by everyone in the country. Stakeholders in the education industry expect a transition in curriculum to accommodate technology, the teacher's role, and the employment situation. The goal of NEP 2020 is commendable, but putting it into action will be challenging, and how well the plan is implemented at the grassroots level of our educational system will determine a lot. Only academic and administrative changes will be visible if the NEP 2020 is successfully implemented in schools, higher education patterns, and curriculum. The implementation of NEP 2020 will face numerous challenges, but the new education policy will surely break down boundaries between curriculums, bringing varied subjects together, which is vital for new generation jobs. All stakeholders in education, including academics, institute owners, and regulatory authorities, will need to change their mindsets. Digitalization will have a significant impact on pedagogy. Rather than simply sharing information, the focus must shift to employability and quality. On the other hand, traditional education will always be a continuous process. Training, development, and upgradation would be mandatory for both students and staff. NEP 2020 will forever transform the nation's intellectual and socioeconomic foundation if it is properly planned, designed, and implemented.

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