



National Education Policy 2020: Opportunities & Challenges

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Introduction

The **National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)** is the education policy of India, announced by the Government of India on **29 July 2020**. It is a policy document that outlines the government's vision for the future of education in the country. This policy determines the direction and condition of the education sector. The central government has set a target to fully implement this policy by **2030**.

In independent India, the first education policy was formulated in **1968** based on the recommendations of the **Kothari Commission**. Later, in **1985**, a document titled "Challenge of Education" was prepared, which included suggestions and comments from various sections of Indian society (intellectual, social, political, administrative, etc.). Based on this, the second National Education Policy was introduced in **1986** (modified in **1992**) and implemented across the country during the tenure of Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi**.

In the present time, under the leadership of Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**, the Government of India approved the **National Education Policy 2020**, replacing the 34-year-old policy of 1986. This is the **third education policy of India**, following those of 1968 and 1986, and the first policy of the 21st century. Under NEP 2020, the central and state governments aim to increase public investment in education to **6% of GDP**.

In June 2017, the Government of India formed a committee under the chairmanship of **Dr. K. Kasturirangan** (former ISRO chief). This committee submitted the draft of the National Education Policy in **May 2019**, which was approved by the Union Cabinet on **29 July 2020**.

Why was a change in the previous education policy necessary?

1. To fulfill the requirements of a knowledge-based economy within the changing global landscape.
2. To enhance the quality of education and to promote innovation and research.
3. To ensure the global reach and presence of the Indian education system.

New Education Policy: Key Provisions—

Under the New Education Policy, a decision has been taken to rename the "Ministry of Human Resource Development" back to the "Ministry of Education." It includes a provision for the establishment of the "Higher Education Commission of India" as a single apex body for all higher education (excluding legal and medical education).

Subjects such as music, sports, yoga, etc., will be integrated into the core curriculum rather than being treated as subsidiary or extra-curricular subjects.

The policy sets a target of spending 6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the education system, a figure that currently stands at 4.43 percent.

Establishment of the National Research Foundation:

Modeled after the National Science Foundation, the establishment of a "National Research Foundation" has been proposed. This foundation will include provisions to cover social sciences alongside the natural sciences. Through this initiative, a culture of research will be fostered, and researchers in India will be encouraged. Consequently, new research breakthroughs will emerge, contributing significantly to the nation's progress.

Provisions Related to Early Childhood Education in the NEP:

The NEP includes specific provisions to place special emphasis on children up to the age of 6 years. According to research, approximately 85 percent of a child's brain development occurs by the age of 6. Therefore, the age of 6 is considered critical for a child's physical and cognitive development.

The NEP also includes a provision for the implementation of the "NIPUN" scheme, aimed at fostering foundational literacy and numeracy skills during early childhood. The full name of this scheme is the "National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy." Through this initiative, students will be provided with foundational literacy and



numeracy skills by the end of Grade 3. This will enable them to acquire the capacity to read, write, and develop a basic understanding of arithmetic.

A key objective or provision of the NEP is to reduce the dropout rate. This scheme has introduced flexibility into the education system, thereby enabling children to access education with ease. Students are empowered to select the subjects they wish to study; under the NEP, the options for subject selection have been made flexible. Consequently, this is expected to lead to a reduction in the dropout rate.

The NEP also emphasizes ensuring the quality of the Mid-Day Meal so that children do not need to bring lunchboxes from home. Additionally, adequate drinking water facilities must be made available in schools to eliminate the need for children to carry water bottles. These provisions will effectively reduce the size and weight of school bags. The NEP places special emphasis on children's homework. Under this policy, children up to Grade 2 will not be assigned any homework. Students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 will be assigned a maximum of two hours of homework per week. Students in Grades 6 through 8 will receive one hour of homework daily, while those in Grades 9 through 12 will receive two hours of homework daily. A significant recommendation has been made to replace the existing 10+2 format in schools with a 5+3+3+4 format. Under this structure, the first five years will constitute the Foundational Stage, comprising three years of pre-primary schooling followed by Grades 1 and 2. This will be followed by three years covering Grades 3, 4, and 5; subsequently, a three-year Middle Stage (Grades 6 through 8) will follow. The fourth stage—the Secondary Stage—will span four years (Grades 9 through 12). While the freedom to choose subjects was previously available only from Grade 11, it will now be available starting from Grade 9.

From Grade 1 through Grade 5, the medium of instruction will be the mother tongue or the regional language. This initiative aims to eliminate "rote learning"—a major shortcoming of the current education system.

The NEP sets a target of achieving a 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by the year 2030.

Provisions related to Higher Education within the NEP:

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the nation's development and in reducing the rate of unemployment. Since higher education is imparted through universities, the NEP places significant emphasis on various provisions aimed at reforming university education and enhancing its quality. The objective is to empower the nation's youth and facilitate their holistic development.

To address the fragmentation within higher education, the NEP emphasizes the transformation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) into large, multidisciplinary universities. A target has been set for each HEI to cater to a student body of approximately 3,000 or more, thereby fostering the social and mental development of the students.

The NEP also prioritizes the promotion of vocational education to ensure the all-round development of students. It is a well-known fact that, historically, vocational education has been accorded relatively low importance in our country; through this policy, however, the focus is on dispelling the prevailing social stigma associated with vocational education and integrating an increasing number of students into this stream. Under this initiative, a target has been established to provide vocational education to at least 50 percent of students—spanning both the school and higher education systems—by the year 2025.

The NEP proposes discontinuing the M.Phil. program. Consequently, to pursue research, students will now be able to seek admission directly into a Ph.D. program after completing a three-year undergraduate degree followed by a two-year postgraduate degree.

The NEP places special emphasis on teacher training. To bring about comprehensive reforms in education, it recommends integrating teacher training and all educational programs at the college and university levels.

A key recommendation within the NEP concerns the selection of subjects. Previously, subject choices were restricted based on specific academic streams or groups; however, this system has now been overhauled. For instance, students pursuing engineering can now opt to study



music alongside their core subjects. Vocational and academic streams will no longer be kept separate, thereby providing students with the opportunity to develop competencies in both areas.

A major proposal of the NEP relates to undergraduate courses. The policy suggests structuring undergraduate programs as either three or four years in duration, incorporating multiple exit options—each accompanied by appropriate certification. For example, if a student completes one year of an undergraduate program, they will be awarded a Certificate; after two years, an Advanced Diploma; after three years, a Bachelor's Degree; and after four years, a Bachelor's Degree with Research.

The NEP includes provisions for the establishment of the "Higher Education Commission of India" (HECI), which will serve as the single overarching body for higher education (excluding medical and legal education). The HECI will comprise four verticals: the National Higher Education Regulatory Council, the General Education Council, the Higher Education Council, and the National Accreditation Council.

B.Ed. Now 4 Years Long:

Under the NEP, it has been proposed to extend the B.Ed. program to four years. By the end of 2030, the minimum qualification for a teacher will be a 4-year B.Ed. program.

Other Recommendations:

Provisions for Children with Disabilities:

This policy includes provisions for children with disabilities, such as cross-disability training, resource centers, accommodation, appropriate technology-based aids, and ensuring their regular participation from early childhood education through to higher education.

Provisions Regarding Traditional Knowledge:

Indian Knowledge Systems—encompassing knowledge rooted in Indian culture, history, and values, as well as tribal and indigenous knowledge—will be integrated into the curriculum in a precise and scientific manner. The aim is to foster the development of every student in such a way that they become 'Global Citizens' without becoming disconnected from their roots.

Thus, it is evident that the primary objective of the NEP 2020 is to elevate the standard of education provided in India to a global level, thereby enabling India to emerge as a global knowledge superpower.

Challenges Facing the New Education Policy:

1. Education is a subject listed under the Concurrent List of the Constitution. Consequently, most states maintain their own independent school boards. To ensure the effective implementation of the New Education Policy, it will be essential to consult with state governments and secure their approval and consensus. The policy's proposal to establish a National Education Regulatory Council as a top-tier regulatory mechanism could face opposition from states; this is due to concerns that it infringes upon the states' jurisdiction in the education sector, as well as the fact that the Education Commission did not include the Education Ministers of the various states.
2. The New Education Policy promotes the corporatization of education. Furthermore, it has paved the way for the entry of foreign universities into the country. Various educationists believe that the entry of foreign universities into the country raises apprehensions that the Indian education system may become more expensive. Consequently, obtaining higher education could become a challenging endeavor for students from lower-income backgrounds.
3. The New Education Policy places significant emphasis on the 'culturalization' of education. This policy underscores the importance of ancient Indian culture, knowledge systems, and values. A major challenge, however, lies in determining which specific culture—from among India's diverse cultural tapestry—will be accorded special prominence within the curriculum.
4. Another challenge in implementing the New Education Policy is ensuring adequate financial backing. The policy sets a target of allocating 6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product



(GDP) to the education sector. The extent to which the political will to actually expend this amount is robust remains a matter yet to be revealed by the future.

5. Currently, there is a dearth of skilled teachers in the field of elementary education. Given this context, the implementation of the provisions outlined for elementary education under the National Education Policy, 2020, faces numerous practical hurdles.

Conclusion:

The New National Education Policy is a highly pertinent and timely policy, as its primary objective is to transform the education system into one that is holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary. With a view to achieving the goals of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all—while simultaneously fostering opportunities for lifelong learning—the New Education Policy places strong emphasis on nurturing the unique capabilities of students, promoting flexibility, transcending rigid disciplinary silos, and fostering the unity and integrity of knowledge through a holistic, multidisciplinary educational approach that also incorporates the teaching of life skills.

Nevertheless, in essence, it can be concluded that: "By virtue of its sheer scope and holistic nature, this policy is a welcome initiative. It represents a concrete necessity for a progressive, developmental outlook—one that promises to serve as a pivotal project enabling us to soar toward the horizons of modernity while remaining firmly anchored to our roots."

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