

Analyzing the NEP 2020 for Achieving SDGs

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Abstract

The NEP 2020 was launched at a time when the nation was struggling to make sense of the pandemic, at a time when there was no clarity regarding major decisions such as board exams and entrance exams for various courses. At a time when the general population was struggling for their lives and livelihoods, the policy was introduced with lofty ambitions, vague procedures and long-term changes. The replacement of the Central Education Minister since also raises questions.

The implications for these changes are equally concerning. The country is seeing ever larger number of students going abroad, a new wave of brain-drain. The cost of private higher education has increased exponentially but there are few checks on its quality. There are exciting developments like foreign universities setting up campuses in India but it deflects attention from the fact that it will only perpetuate the current class bias in education.

This article aims at clarifying the major provisions of the NEP 2020 and understanding its impact, both positive and negative, on the various stakeholders in the current education system.

Keywords: NEP, SDGs, analysis.

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Introduction

The new National Education Policy 2020 was launched to provide equitable access to high quality education for learners of all classes and social categories. However, its reception has raised a few questions.

The NEP 2020 was launched at a time when the nation was struggling to make sense of the pandemic, at a time when there was no clarity regarding major decisions such as board exams and entrance exams for various courses. At a time when the general population was struggling for their lives and livelihoods, the policy was introduced with lofty ambitions, vague procedures and long-term changes. The replacement of the Central Education Minister since also raises questions.

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Literature Review

According to Kurien and Chandramana (2020), the new education policy has a laudable vision, but its strength will depend on whether it is able to effectively integrate with the other policy initiatives of government like Digital India and Skill India to name a few, to effect a coherent structural transformation. Policy linkages alone will ensure that this policy learns from Skill India's experience in engaging more dynamically with the corporate sector to shape a successful vocational education curriculum. We also need more evidence-based decision-making to adapt to rapidly evolving transmutations and disruptions. We also need real-time evaluation systems and a consultative monitoring and review framework to empower the education system to constantly reform itself, instead of expecting a

new education policy every decade for a shift in curriculum (Kurien and Chandramana, 2020).

As per Kumar, et al (2020), the National Education Policy 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for primary education, business studies and technical education along with internet-based e-learning which is a paradigm shift from the conventional system. The essence of NEP is access, equity, affordability, responsibility, and quality. NEP should be implemented with great caution to address challenges that are required for fostering quality education for all (Kumar, et al, 2020).

The NEP focuses on student-centered education, but such a system could destroy the essence of education and raise moral, ethical, and cultural issues like gender, caste and class. A liberal and progressive education policy must include meaningful research and innovation which can enhance the quality of education. Co-creation of values will be an additional inducement to student's perception of learning. Quality and better selling education can be devised by linking theories that lead to entrepreneurship, innovation, research, and value-added teaching-learning process (Smørvik & Vespestad, 2020).

According to Kumar (2021), the NEP seems to be formulated to push the privatization of education in India. It talks of encouraging the global top 100 colleges to open their campuses in India. Whether this is to further the cause of education or facilitate profiteering is debatable. Although NEP 2020 talks of greater transparency, especially in relation to fee structure, it does not indicate any road map on how to tackle the growing malady of capitation fees by private colleges which are mostly run by powerful groups. Education for all will thus remain a distant dream for many, especially the marginalized and deprived sections (Kumar, 2021).

Rationale:

The literature review indicates that though there are numerous progressive provisions in the NEP, its implications have not been thought through. This is especially so in case of professional courses such as social work wherein leaving

the course/program after a few semesters would create only a semi-trained social worker with most basic skills like observation and interviewing conspicuous by their absence. How will such semi-trained persons follow this profession and how will such ill-informed and unskilled practice impact the profession? This study was undertaken to understand the probable impact of the NEP 2020 as per social work educators.

Objectives

- To identify the main provisions of the NEP 2020 as per social work educators
- To understand the educators' opinions on these provisions

Research Design

This is a quantitative and descriptive study. A quantitative design was selected because the study seeks to identify the experiences of social work educators. The data was collected at the respondents' offices amidst their natural environment without any manipulation.

Sources of Information

The primary sources of information were social work educators. The secondary sources were books, journals, reports, websites etc.

Sampling Design and Sample Size

The research respondents were selected using simple random sampling from a list of social work educators from TISS and CSWNN, Mumbai. 30 names were randomly selected and interviewed.

Tools of Data Collection

The data was collected using an interview schedule.

Findings

The NEP was launched during the pandemic when the country's people were struggling for their lives and livelihoods, 34 years after the previous policy. The policy was launched at a time when education was not a priority, survival was.

Was it a calculated move to insert far-reaching changes in a crucial policy at a time when most people survived only on their will to live? The replacement of the then education minister also raises eyebrows. Speculation has no end but there are a few important, overarching questions the policy raises.

NEP-2020 aspires to combine traditional knowledge with modern thinking and introduces vocational education from elementary schools. Vocational training, as per Gandhi's Nai Taalim is an excellent way to not just learn a trade to become financially independent but it will also instill in the learner the dignity of labor and compassion for the downtrodden. According to Gandhi, education is not just for the brain but also for the heart and soul. However, any vocation, be it gardening or cooking or stitching, which can be feasibly taught to many children, takes at least a few years to learn to make it financially viable. Unless a student shows specific interest in learning a particular trade as his or her vocation, the vocational training will be at most a brief peek into the trades that can be taught in a school and will always remain secondary to academic learning.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes technology in education and attempts to transform education planning, teaching, and learning assessment. As the pandemic revealed, many students do not have access to smart phones or even electricity. How would they benefit from the new modes of learning, especially after the pandemic has caused rising poverty and job losses? There is no budget to provide phones to poor students or to build e-infrastructure in rural areas. There is a significant digital divide at all levels from school to university.

A National Education Technology Forum will be established to advance digital learning and e-content in eight regional languages. How will we align graduates in regional languages with job opportunities?

'School readiness' has been prioritized as the foundation of learning. Pratham's ASER 2014-16 reports that the RTE Act 2009 mandates that children should enter Std I at age 6. It recommends states provide free pre-school education to children aged 3-6. However, existing data and studies show that ground realities are different from policy norms as far as age of entry to Std I is concerned. Part of the

“learning crisis” in elementary school happens even before children enter Std I. This may be because:

- ▶ Too many children enter formal schooling before age 6.
- ▶ Too many children enter formal schooling without exposure to early childhood education and therefore lack readiness for school.

When children enter school already “behind” or begin to “fall behind” early, it is hard for them to “catch up” later. Pratham’s study too concludes that all factors being equal, children with poor learning outcomes in Std VIII are likelier to drop out after elementary school. Neither Anganwadi centres nor primary schools have the infrastructural, procedures or resources to try new ways of learning (<http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Research%20and%20Assessments/Current/Education/Research%20Projects/StudyonAccessTransitionandLearninginSecondaryEducationFullReportJanuary2018.pdf>).

NEP-2020 plans to remodel higher education in India and establish reputed universities. India has more than 800 universities. How many existing Indian universities are equipped to compete with universities of global repute? Self-financed courses have also surged with a constant fee hike. But the quality of education imparted remains low. Also, if the state does not provide education to the under-privileged, starting foreign university campuses in the country will only widen the rich and poor divide. Foreign universities can have campuses in India but will they provide reservation to economically poor students? Can NEP-2020 motivate students to study in India instead of going abroad?

The education sector is expected to get 6 per cent of the GDP. How will the Centre raise the funds amidst an economic crisis? Will it bear the brunt of the expenditure or ask the states?

The policy allows multiple entries and exits to increase educational mobility. How does this mobility affect job readiness?

NEP-2020 shows concern about teachers’ credibility. Innumerable teaching posts are vacant or filled with ad hoc candidates. Is it possible to make a long-term,

sustainable plan with scanty resources when educational institutions lack basics such as benches, blackboards, libraries etc?

The NEP aims to create a knowledge economy. A knowledge-based economy requires its pupils to develop a combination of skills and prioritizes scientific temperament to enhance employment opportunities. However, with growing economic hardship and educational expenses, the education of the girl child and children with disabilities could be considered a luxury.

Common entrance exams for universities, reforms in the school examination system and mother-tongue-based primary education are other provisions of the NEP. How would the quality of secondary education be enhanced?

The policy recommends the discontinuation of MPhil course. What will happen to the students pursuing this degree?

Social Work Intervention

1. Utilize the existing human and financial resources of professional social work organizations like MASWE to conduct regular training programs regarding all aspects of NEP 2020 such as syllabi and deliverables.
2. Organize dialogue with educators and students of other subjects about their experiences with NEP 2020.
3. Outlining initiatives for increasing visibility and enrollment of professional courses.
4. Tracking students who are at risk of or have dropped out and listing and ameliorating indicators.
5. Tracking students' progress during and after completing the course.
6. Strengthening networking with local communities and NGOs for students' skilling and employment.

Conclusion

Post pandemic, the rich-poor gap in India has widened and the bridge of quality public education you could cross to move from the have-nots to the haves is steadily disintegrating. If it breaks, there will only be social conflict. What we need from the NEP to attain the SDGs is inclusion of the marginalized students, especially children with disability and poor children and enhancing the functioning of elementary, primary and higher education institutions.

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