National Education Policy (2020)- Opportunities and Challenges in Education

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ABSTRACT

A well- defined , well- designed and comprehensive education policy leads to good and quality education in a country and essential at school, college and university level for economic and social progress. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) is a path breaking document in every aspect. NEP (2020) is a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher education as well as vocational training in rural and urban area. It envisions an India centric education system that provide high quality education to all. It aims to address structural in equities, pedagogical issues and broadening the access apart from making the learner's future ready while meeting the demand of 21st century India. 'The NEP (2020) is based on pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability, accountability and it will transform India into a vibrant knowledge hub (Prime Minister Narender Modi)'. It brings some fundamental changes to the current education system. Simultaneously, It has to deal with multiple crises of education system.

It's effective implementation is critical if India wants to reap the demographic dividend and capitalize the opportunities from a rapidly growing knowledge economy. Availability of financial resources, education ecosystem also acts as a drag on new ideas and innovation. This conceptual research paper is related to opportunities and challenges in implementation of NEP 2020. Different states have different education system and therefore, it would be a little challenging to accept one uniform education policy. We need to understand that through proper understanding, cooperation and participation we can overcome the challenges and make it successful across the country. In the paper author tried to discuss thrust areas and some key points of NEP (2020) in respect of higher education and challenges in its implementation.

Keywords: National Education Policy, Higher Education, Challenges Opportunities, Implimentation

INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (NPE) is a policy formulated by the Government of India to promote education amongst India's people. The policy covers elementary education to colleges in both rural and urban India. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system. The policy is a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher education as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India.

The NEP 2020 enacts numerous changes in India's education policy. It aims to increase state expenditure on education from around 4% to 6% of the GDP as soon as possible. The vision of the National Education Policy 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."

The new education policy brings some fundamental changes to the current system, and the key highlights are multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one in or near every district, revamping student curricula, pedagogy, evaluation, and support for enhanced student experience, establishing a National Research Foundation to support excellent peer-reviewed work and effectively seed study at universities and colleges.

The National Education Policy is expected to bring positive and long-lasting impact on the education system of the country. The fact that foreign universities will be allowed to open campuses in India is a commendable initiative by the government. This will help the students experience the global quality of education in their very own country. The policy of introducing multi-disciplinary institutes will lead to a renewed focus on every field such as arts, humanities and this form of education will help students to learn and grow holistically. Thus, students will be equipped with stronger knowledge base.

The most important component of this Education Policy is Digital literacy and Computational thinking. The emphasis would be given to make students digitally literate and also will be trained in programming and coding to enhance their IT skills. It plans to have more and more online courses and expects to have tie-ups with top-level Universities and Institutes to have more Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC's).

NEP 2020: Opportunities

It presents several opportunities for students, teachers, and educational institutions. Here are some of the key opportunities presented by NEP 2020:

1. Holistic and multidisciplinary education: NEP 2020 encourages a multidisciplinary approach to education, which means that students will have the opportunity to learn a wide range of subjects and develop a broad set of skills. This will help them become well-rounded individuals and prepare them for the complex challenges of the 21st century.

2. Skill development: NEP 2020 emphasizes the development of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and communication. This will help students become more employable and better equipped to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

3. Flexibility and choice: NEP 2020 offers greater flexibility and choice to students in terms of what they can learn, how they can learn, and when they can learn. This will allow students to tailor their education to their individual needs and interests.

4. Technology integration: NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of technology in education and promotes its integration across all levels of education. This will help students and teachers stay connected and engage in new and innovative learning experiences.

5. Quality improvement: NEP 2020 aims to improve the overall quality of education in India by introducing new standards, monitoring mechanisms, and accreditation systems. This will ensure that educational institutions are providing high-quality education and that students are receiving the best possible learning experience.

NEP 2020: Challenges

The new National Education Policy (NEP) was announced right in the middle of the pandemic in July for making India's education system future ready and bringing the much-needed transformational changes in the present Indian education system with a global perspective.

With the new policy, early childhood education has been brought in the realms of mainstream education for the first time. Skill-based learning is being prioritised with greater use and implementation of modern technologies. A multi-disciplinary, value-based approach to education focussing on holistic development along with life-skills training has been suggested in the policy to improve employability of students. Though the NEP 2020 is path-breaking, the lack of a clear roadmap for implementation of the proposals in it is delaying the much-needed educator sector reforms, which is crucial for sustaining India's future growth.

Holistic and multidisciplinary education should strive in an integrated way to improve all human capacities-mental, cultural, social, physical, emotional, and moral. In the long term, such a comprehensive education shall be the method for all undergraduate programs, including those in medical, technical, and vocational disciplines. Optimal learning environments and support for students offer a holistic approach including adequate curriculum, interactive pedagogy, consistent formative assessment, and adequate support for students. There are certain challenges that the government must also address to expedite the implementation process.

Inviting private sector funding

Considering the pronounced move towards digitalisation and e-learning a higher spend would be needed for establishing the required technology and digital infrastructure. Developed countries allocate up to 20 per cent of their GDP on education, and India would also need to ramp up its spend in order to succeed it and for bringing the education sector at par with global standards.

In the current situation of the economy the private sector's funding is required to meet the developmental goals is a plausible solution. The government should start evaluating PPP models without further delay for getting the private sector to contribute, collaborate, and collectively utilise their expertise for expediting the transformation of education in India.

At present, India's higher education enrolment, calculated in terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), is only 26%. The goal of doubling GER by 2035 will require far higher and faster investment in ramping up the higher education infrastructure.

Such conversions could be fast-tracked through Public-Private -Partnership (PPP) participation, which could be similar to the built-operate-transfer (BOT) infrastructure projects. The collaboration between government, higher education institutions service providers, Ed-tech companies and public and private sectors is the need of the hour for creating the requisite education infrastructure in urban and rural areas.

Language policy: NEP-2020 has proposed a three-language formula, which has sparked controversy in some states. There is a concern that the policy may lead to the imposition of a particular language and undermine the linguistic diversity of the country.

Teacher training: The policy emphasizes the need for teacher training and development, but there are several challenges in implementing this. The existing teacher education system needs to be revamped to meet the changing needs of the education system.

Assessment system: The policy proposes a new assessment system that focuses on the holistic development of the students. However, there is a concern that the implementation of the new assessment system may be challenging, especially in rural areas where resources are limited.

Greater focus on improving teaching standards:
With the modernisation of school and college infrastructure, teachers also need to be skilled in modern teaching pedagogies and methodologies. Hence, while ramping up infrastructure of schools and colleges, improving quality of teachers must also go hand-in-hand to prepare a ready and vast pool of trained teachers for the 21st century classrooms.

Expediting digital infrastructure development:
Education is one of the areas where digital disparity was prominently visible during the lockdown when many students didn't have the means and access to continue their education through the online mode.

Huge investments will be needed for developing digital infrastructure such as digital classrooms, remote expertise-driven teaching models, AR/VR tools to bridge gaps in physical teaching and creating laboratory infrastructure.

Like the government is opening up the private investments in infrastructure sector such as power, telecom and transport, digital infrastructure development in higher education institutes and schools also needs to be fast tracked through the private sector funding. Private players should be roped in to develop the digital infrastructure in government educational institutions within stipulated deadlines and also allowed to run it.

Enforcing a common implementation plan
With no fixed roadmap to follow for the implementation of the new education policy, the states and Union territories are announcing their own plans and deadlines. However, such asynchronous implementation will defeat the very purpose of NEP to provide equitable opportunities to access standardised and high quality of education to all and from every parts of the country.

The government must issue guidelines to state governments on a common implementation roadmap. Fixed deadlines must be assigned for achieving each of the milestones in order to make the NEP implementation process smoother, seamless and synchronised across the country.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES:

Here are some strategies that can be implemented to address the challenges identified in NEP 2020:

Promote Multilingualism:

India is a diverse country with multiple languages, and promoting multilingualism can be a challenge. The NEP 2020 proposes introducing a three-language formula and promoting the mother tongue as the medium of instruction up to grade 5. The government can promote this by encouraging schools to use the local language as a medium of instruction and creating resources for teachers to teach in multiple languages.

Strengthen Teacher Training:

The quality of teaching is a significant challenge in the Indian education system. To address this, the government can invest in teacher training programs that emphasize pedagogy, technology integration, and subject-specific training. The NEP 2020 proposes a four-year integrated B.Ed program, which can help to improve the quality of teachers in the country.

Increase Access to Education:
One of the main challenges in the Indian education system is access to education, especially for marginalized communities. To address this, the government can increase funding for education, especially for schools in rural areas. The government can also encourage private sector participation in education to improve infrastructure and resources in schools.

Promote Holistic Development:
The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of holistic development, including physical, social, and emotional development. To address this challenge, the government can introduce co-curricular activities in schools, including sports, arts, and music. Schools can also provide counseling services and mental health support for students.

CONCLUSION

The NEP 2020 presents significant opportunities for transforming the education system in India, but its successful implementation will require overcoming various challenges.Different states have different education systems and hence accepting one uniform education policy would be a bit challenging. However, we need to understand that through proper participation we can overcome this challenge and make it successful across the country. 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, Skill India and the New Industrial Policy to name a few, in order to effect a coherent structural transformation. The NEP 2020 is a defining moment for higher education. Effective and time-bound implementation is what will make it truly path-breaking.

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