

REIMAGINING INDIAN EDUCATION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPACTS

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ABSTRACT

India's educational landscape has witnessed significant transformation through successive national policies designed to address the country's evolving socio-economic and cultural needs. This study presents a comprehensive analysis of India's national educational policy developments—from the Kothari Commission (1964–66) to the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It critically examines the intent, structure, implementation, and impact of these policies on accessibility, quality, equity, and employability in education. Using a qualitative policy review methodology, the paper explores how various reforms have attempted to respond to challenges such as regional disparity, gender inequality, rote-based learning, and outdated curriculum structures. The analysis highlights both progress and persistent gaps, offering insights into how NEP 2020 reimagines Indian education through a holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary approach. The study concludes with reflections on the policy-practice divide and recommendations for effective implementation to realize India's vision of inclusive and transformative education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a foundational role in shaping a nation's human capital, social cohesion, and economic development. In a diverse and populous country like India, formulating effective educational policies has long been a priority to promote equality, foster innovation, and drive long-term progress. Since independence, India

has witnessed a series of landmark policy interventions aimed at restructuring its educational system. These range from the Kothari Commission Report (1966), which laid the groundwork for a national education framework, to the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 and its 1992 revision, and most recently, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Each of these policies was crafted in response to distinct historical, political, and socio-economic contexts. Collectively, they have sought to enhance access to education, improve quality, reduce dropout rates, and align educational outcomes with national development goals. However, India's education system continues to face challenges, including wide rural-urban disparities, high student-to-teacher ratios, lack of vocational integration, and a disconnect between curriculum and real-world skills.

This paper seeks to analyze the evolution and impact of India's national educational policies, identifying recurring themes, strengths, and shortcomings. It offers a detailed review of policy frameworks, highlights the socio-political motivations behind their formation, and evaluates their implementation effectiveness. Special attention is given to NEP 2020, which promises a paradigm shift toward learner-centric and future-ready education. By examining both historical context and current aspirations, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on reimagining education in India for the 21st century.

II. PROGRAM OF ACTION (POA) 1992

The 1986 National Policy on Education was modified once in 1992 by the P. V. Narasimha Rao government and in 2005, and later in 2004 by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 brought about the Universalization of Elementary Education – UEE, expansion of secondary education, opening of Navodaya Vidyalayas and the conducting of a common entrance examination on all India basis for admission to professional and technical programmes in the country, and accordingly Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and All India Engineering Entrance Examinations (AIEEE) at the National level and the State Level Engineering Entrance Examinations (SLEEE) have been organized for maintenance of professional standards across the country.

Despite the vision of a more student-centric learning environment, POA 1992 did not suggest any concrete steps to help with this goal. It did not highlight the changes needed in the textbooks, pedagogies, and teacher training to create a more learner-centric schooling system. Even at the university level, there was no proper planning shared for resource mobilization as suggested in the POA. And once again funds mattered and these policies could not be 100% successful.

Modifications of Program of Action in 2005 The Common Minimum Programme is a document outlining the minimum objectives of a coalition government of UPA in India during 2004. The document has acquired prominence since coalition governments have become the norm in India. In 2005, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh adopted the 'Common Minimum Programme' which coined the idea of conducting one common entrance

examination on all India bases for admission to professional and technical programmes in the country. To fully empower women politically, educationally, economically and legally and to provide for full equality of opportunity, particularly in education and employment for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and religious minorities was given utmost importance in the modification during 2005.

National Education Policy 2020

New Policy was introduced because the results of a survey conducted by NCERT, supported by the Union Ministry of Education was done that showed, students across 12 states scored significantly below the national average in mathematics ability. National Achievement Survey (NAS) is a nationally representative large-scale survey of students' learning undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. NAS gives a system.

level reflection on effectiveness of school education and identifies learning as a big challenge facing Indian education. A committee of nine-member submitted the draft of the New Education Policy (NEP) in 2019, which was approved by the Union cabinet in July 2020. It recommended greater autonomy for higher education institutions and an increase in the national annual outlay for education to 6 per cent of GDP.

Accordingly, in 2019, the Ministry of Human Resource Development released a Draft New Education Policy 2019, which was followed by a number of public consultations. A Committee led by Dr K. Kasturirangan presented New Draft of National Education Policy. The Draft Policy is built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability & Accountability. It discusses reducing

curriculum content to enhance essential learning, critical thinking and more holistic experiential, discussion-based and analysis-based learning. It also talks about a revision of the curriculum and pedagogical structure from a 10+2 system to a 5+3+3+4 system design in an effort to optimise learning for students based on cognitive development of children.

On 29 July 2020, the cabinet approved a new National Education Policy with an aim to introduce several changes to the existing Indian education system, which will be introduced in India till 2026.

Salient Features of National Policy on Education 2020:

1. Extension of the Right to Education (RTE) Act: RTE, which currently applies to classes I to VIII, will now be applicable to the entire school system from pre-school to class XII. It will cover children of ages 3 to 18 (preschool to senior secondary level).

2. Sanskrit at all levels of education: Sanskrit should be taught at all levels of school and higher education as one of the optional languages on par with all Schedule 8 languages. Sanskrit textbooks at the Foundational and Middle school level may be rewritten in Simple Standard Sanskrit (SSS) in order to teach Sanskrit through Sanskrit (STS).

3. Restructuring of school curriculum and 5+3+3+4 design: The 10+2 structure of school curricula will be replaced by a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure corresponding to ages 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively. The new system will have 12 years of schooling with three years of Anganwadi or pre-schooling; So schools will be re-organized into school complexes. Under the proposed 5+3+3+4 design:

- The first five years of schooling of children in the age group of 3 to 8 years would be marked as Foundational Stage (it includes three years of pre-primary plus grade 1 and grade 2).

- The next three years of schooling, to be marked as a Preparatory Stage for the children in the age group of 8 to 11 years (will include grades 3 to 5).

- Middle Stage (grades 6 to 8) for the students in the age group of 11-14 years.

- Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12) for students in the age group of 14-18 years.

4. System for flexible and multiple board examinations: Introduction of a semester system in school education for students of classes 10 to 12, with provisions for holding "flexible and modular board examinations". Students will be able to take a board examination in a given subject in whichever semester they take the corresponding class in school, whenever they feel most ready. They should be able to take any such subject board examination again if they feel they can study and do better. Board exams will be based on knowledge application.

5. Home language, mother tongue or regional languages are going to be used as a medium of instruction up to class 5.

6. School curriculum will be reduced to core concepts; integration of vocational education from class 6.

7. Common entrance exams will be conducted for admission to universities and higher education institutions.

8. Restructuring of the higher education institutions: by placing them under three categories:

- The first primarily being focussed on research.

- Second providing high-quality teaching across disciplines with significant contribution to research.

- Third providing quality teaching focussed on undergraduate education.

9. Multiple Exit options in Higher Education: It also suggests the introduction of four-year undergraduate programmes in higher education institutions and restructuring of the current 3- year B.A., B.Sc., B. Com. and B. Voc. programmes with provisions to provide students with "multiple exit and entry options".

10. Establishment of a Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (National Education Commission): It is a constitutional body through an Act of Parliament, with the Prime Minister being its Chairperson.

11. Rajya Shiksha Ayog/State Education Commissions may be constituted in each state.

12. Establishment of one higher education regulator—National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA)— that will subsume all other bodies like UGC, AICTE and others into it. All higher education institutions, except legal and medical colleges, will be governed by a single regulator.

13. Common norms have been placed for private and public higher education institutions.

14. MPhil courses have been discontinued.

15. A national programme for the professional development of faculty members of the higher education institutions.

16. A regulatory body called -- National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) has been set up to use technology for better learning outcomes.

III. CONCLUSION

India's journey through successive educational policies reflects a persistent ambition to democratize education and align it with the country's developmental aspirations. From the foundational vision of the Kothari Commission to the structural reform propositions of NEP 2020, each policy has introduced critical innovations while grappling with systemic limitations.

This study reveals that while significant strides have been made in expanding access, increasing literacy, and introducing value-based education, gaps remain in equity, infrastructure, quality assurance, and employability outcomes. The recurring challenge lies not in policy formulation, but in execution, hindered by bureaucratic inertia, resource constraints, and inconsistent monitoring mechanisms.

NEP 2020 represents a bold step forward in reimagining Indian education with its emphasis on flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and skill development. However, its success will depend on robust implementation strategies, stakeholder engagement, and sustained political and financial commitment.

In conclusion, India stands at a pivotal moment in its educational reform trajectory. Realizing the transformative vision of national education policies requires not just legislative intent but a collaborative ecosystem of educators, institutions, and communities committed to fostering inclusive, equitable, and future-ready learning environments.

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