

Research Paper

## Inclusive and Accessible Education and NEP 2020 as a Blueprint for Fostering Quality Education

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### ABSTRACT

Education always plays a vital role in the life of a person. Government of India tries to improve the education system. NEP 2020 is also a good step to achieve the goals of 100 percent literacy in India. The National Education Policy (NEP 2020), introduced by the Government of India to represents a transformative blueprint aimed at reshaping the educational landscape. The policy's emphasis on flexible learning pathways, the integration of technology, multilingualism, and teacher empowerment provides a comprehensive approach to building an inclusive educational system. The main objective of this paper is to critically and deeply study the key strategies outlined in NEP 2020 and evaluates their implications for creating a more equitable education system, highlighting the roles of a variety of stakeholders including state, central and local government, educators, and communities. It also discusses the potential barriers to effective implementation and proposes recommendations for ensuring that the policy's vision translates into meaningful outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable groups. In this review paper researcher also try to explore the NEP 2020's potential to foster inclusive and accessible education for all, with a particular focus on marginalized communities and underserved regions. By aligning its objectives with global educational goals such as equity, diversity, and lifelong learning, NEP 2020 seeks to address long-standing challenges of educational access, quality, and relevance. In this paper researcher tries to provide an understanding about the provisions and prospective effect of the NEP 2020 on marginalized students in the realm of higher education. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for sustained efforts, policy coherence, and community involvement in realizing NEP 2020's promise of accessible and inclusive education for all. This study compares the higher education initiatives of India in the framework of equity and inclusive education.

**Keywords:** *National Education Policy 2020, Equity, Inclusive Education, Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups*

**A**s we all know that “Education is the most powerful weapon” on the earth to make the changes effectively and positively. Education is very important for all without any discrimination of Gender, caste, occupation and field. It is a fundamental right of a person. National Education Policy (NEP, 2020), has been formulated in a new context

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with the aims and objective of making education accessible to all, making it employment oriented and meeting the challenge of the global stage (Banodha, etc, 2022). This policy address the different aspects related to teacher and students Like, assessment, teacher training Program, curriculum, Infrastructure etc. Before NEP 2020, two more education policy was made, first in 1968 and second in 1986. NEP 2020 has vision for transformative changes in Education system through Rooted Education System in India that can directly affect the “Vikshit Bharat” and try to make India more sustainable, Equitable to all, Vibrant Knowledge Society and want to remake India “Vishwa Guru”. NEP 2020 also tries to Making India a superpower at global level. ‘Accessible’, ‘Equitable’, ‘Quality’, ‘Affordable’ and Accountable education is the foundation goal of Present Policy that will prepare our Youth to meet different Global Challenges and can beat them (Aithal, S., & Aithal, S. 2020).

At higher level of education, NEP 2020 stresses on the principles and core values that must developed the important and fundamental Skills related to cognition, social, emotional, critical thinking and problem solving and soft skills like cultural awareness, teamwork, empathy, leadership, communication etc (Banodha, etc, 2022). NEP 2020 represent a progressive leap towards a more dynamic landscape, as well as evolving ambition of students to fight with the challenges of today’s globalized and rapidly transforming employment market. NEP 2020 also works with innovative aspect of hands on learning designing (Banodha, etc, 2022). This approach seeks to mind the gap between practical and theoretical knowledge, promoting holistic experience. In this paper researcher also try to explore the NEP 2020’s potential to foster inclusive and accessible education for all, with a particular focus on marginalized communities and underserved regions. By aligning its objectives with global educational goals such as equity, diversity, and lifelong learning, NEP 2020 seeks to address long-standing challenges of educational access, quality, and their relevance.

This study tries to explain the NEP 2020's provisions and their potential impact on underprivileged students in higher education. In order to fulfil NEP 2020's promise of inclusive and accessible education for all, the paper's conclusion highlights the necessity of consistent efforts, policy coherence, and community involvement. In the context of accessible and inclusive education, this study contrasts India's higher education programs.

### ***The Vision of NEP 2020***

NEP 2020 has a vision that could revolutionize the Indian education system. This will be possible by strong base of early childhood education; multidisciplinary learning and culture of research oriented (Kalyani, P. 2020). This policy aims to create a best example for accessible and inclusive education that students can face the challenges related to globally competitive education system and able to make global standard education. The main vision of this policy is to provide quality and lifelong education for all with the principles of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion within the education system to education for all (Kalyani, P. 2020).

NEP 2020 also emphasize that “Education is the single greatest tool for social justice and equity” (Kumar M. 2021). Policy has significance for society and inclusive community development. Present policy also addressed the issues and barriers related to inclusive education.

### ***Issues and Challenges for NEP 2020 for Fostering Inclusive and Accessible Education***

The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) is a determined and transformative framework for the education industry (Banodha, et al., 2022). It tries to make education more inclusive, equitable, and accessible. However, there are several issues and challenges in its implementation, particularly in fostering inclusive and accessible education. Some of the major issues are as follows:

#### **Resources**

After a many years of independence still the main and most important fact is that there is not have the necessary infrastructure like accessible classroom, ramps or other facilities (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022). Most of the schools and colleges faced this situation like insufficient learning material, support staff, lack of infrastructure etc. We need teacher who specialized trained to cater to the different needs of students including disabilities, minority children, and students from disadvantaged communities. We need more professional development program for teachers thus they can use resources with more efficiently and professionally for this concern (Kumar, D. 2020).

#### **Funding**

Financial resources are the most important need for implementing inclusion and accessibility for quality education for all. However, there is often a lack of targeted funding for programs that focus on children with special needs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022). Funds allocated for inclusive education may not always reach the schools or areas where they are most needed, particularly in rural or remote regions (Kumar, D. 2020).

#### **Awareness and Sensitization**

While the NEP talks about inclusivity and accessibility, there is often ignorance among stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and policymakers) about what quality education truly means and how it should be implemented in schools for all (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022). There are social stigmas and prejudices attached to certain communities, such as children from marginalized castes, ethnic minorities, or those with disabilities.

#### **Language and Regional Disparities**

The NEP emphasizes specially on mother-tongue-based education, but the lack of textbooks, teaching materials, and trained teachers in regional languages can create barriers to learning, particularly for children from marginalized linguistic backgrounds (Kumar, D. 2020). There is a significant gap in the availability and quality of educational resources between urban and rural regions (Kumar, D. 2020). Children in rural areas may not have access to the same opportunities or resources, further exacerbating inequality (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022).

#### **Implementation and Monitoring Challenges**

The NEP's recommendations require collaborative efforts at the central, state, and local levels. However, the lack of effective coordination between various levels of government and education authorities can hinder the policy's implementation (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022). There needs to be robust systems to monitor and evaluate the progress of inclusivity goals. Without clear mechanisms to track progress, it is difficult to determine whether policies are effectively being implemented and achieving their objectives.

### **Technology and Digital Divide**

The NEP encourages the use of technology in education, but the digital divide remains a significant challenge (Kumar, D. 2020). Many students, especially in rural and low-income areas, lack access to the internet, devices, or digital literacy skills, preventing them from benefiting from digital learning resources (Kumar, D. 2020). While digital tools can help make education more accessible, students with disabilities may not have the necessary assistive technologies or support systems to fully engage with online platforms or digital content.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogical Adaptations**

The current curriculum in many schools is not flexible enough to accommodate diverse learning needs. While the NEP mentions a shift towards a more holistic and flexible education system, there is resistance to change and a lack of expertise to redesign curricula in ways that truly cater to the needs of all learners (Kumar, D. 2020). Special provisions and adaptations are required for children with learning disabilities. However, schools may lack the tools, training, or knowledge to tailor teaching methods to these children.

### **Social and Economic Disparities**

Socioeconomic status continues to be a significant barrier to inclusive education (Panditrao, M. M., & Panditrao, M. M. 2020). Children from economically disadvantaged families often face issues like malnutrition, child labor, or lack of access to schooling, which hampers their ability to benefit from inclusive education initiatives (Bhandari, U., & Mathew, D. J. 2022). Although the NEP focuses on gender equality, girls—especially those from rural and marginalized communities—still face significant barriers to accessing education, including cultural norms, early marriage, and gender-based violence (Kumar, D. 2020).

### **Engagement of Private Sector and Ngo's**

While the NEP encourages the involvement of the private sector and NGOs in promoting inclusive education, the challenge lies in ensuring that such partnerships are not profit-driven and genuinely contribute to the inclusivity goals (Panditrao, M. M., & Panditrao, M. M. 2020). Private institutions, which may be incentivized by profits, often lack proper regulation and oversight, leading to variations in the quality of inclusive education services.

### **Policy Gaps in Support for Special Needs Education**

There is often a lack of comprehensive programs for children with special needs. The NEP does mention the need to address this, but without a clear implementation plan, it remains a challenge to deliver quality special education at scale (Panditrao, M. M., & Panditrao, M. M. 2020). There is a shortage of qualified special educators who can work with students with disabilities. Existing special educators often have large class sizes, limiting their ability to provide personalized attention.

## **STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The two policies preceding this policy also had provisions for the structure of education system, but this policy raised every issue in a new way. The NEP proposes a new structure for the Indian education system:

- 1. Foundational Stage (3-8 years):** It has mainly focus on play-based learning, activity-based pedagogy, and language development. It is also support Integrated curriculum for children in the age group of 3-8 years, covering preschool (Anganwadis) and early grades of school.

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- 2. Preparatory Stage (8-11 years):** It is focus on basic literacy and numeracy, as well as foundational concepts in subjects like science, social studies, and arts. Give emphasis on Introduction to subject-based learning in primary grades.
- 3. Middle Stage (11-14 years):** More subject-specific learning (mathematics, sciences, social sciences, arts). It is Emphasis on building critical thinking as well as problem-solving skills.
- 4. Secondary Stage (14-18 years):** Students can choose any subjects and courses based on their interests, allowing for greater flexibility. Focus on more advanced subjects and vocational training opportunities.

### ***Key Principles of NEP 2020***

NEP 2020 focuses on the five cardinal principles of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability in education with the overall goal of creating an inclusive, flexible and quality education system for all students of India (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023). NEP 2020 also calls for a shift away from rote learning towards critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and creative thinking. Fundamental themes focus on foundational literacy, integration of technology, introduction of multidisciplinary and holistic learning, and inculcation of ethical and constitutional values. We can describe them as follows:

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring access to quality education for all, with a focus on underrepresented groups like girls, children with disabilities, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023).
- **Quality and Excellence:** Improving the quality of education at all levels, with a focus on holistic development and critical thinking (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023).
- **Holistic Development:** Fostering the cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical development of students (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023).
- **Flexibility and Choice:** Allowing students to choose subjects based on their interests and abilities, particularly in the secondary stage (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023).
- **Multilingualism:** Encouraging the use of mother tongue and regional languages for early learning and development (Singh, D., & Mishra, R. S. 2023).

### ***Curriculum and Pedagogy Reforms***

- **Curriculum Framework:** A new national curriculum framework (NCF) to reduce the content load and focus on core learning outcomes. This is Emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and life skills. It is also include Integrating arts, sports, and physical education in the curriculum.
- **Pedagogical Shifts:** This policy focuses on the activity-based and experiential learning methodologies. It is trying to moving away from rote learning towards conceptual understanding. Also focus on reducing the pressure of exams and improving learning outcomes.

### ***Assessment and Evaluation***

- 1. Formative Assessments:** Continuous and comprehensive assessments to track student progress.
- 2. Summative to Formative:** Less emphasis on high-stakes exams; more on periodic assessments.
- 3. Assessment for Learning:** Use assessments to improve teaching and learning rather than just for grading.

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4. **Use of Technology:** Incorporate digital tools and platforms for assessment and feedback.

### ***Teachers and Teacher Education***

1. **Professional Development:** Continuous professional development for teachers, including training in new pedagogical approaches, technology, and special education.
2. **Teacher Recruitment and Standards:** A robust system for teacher recruitment, ensuring the highest standards of professionalism.
3. **Teacher Education:** Focus on four-year integrated B.Ed. programs to prepare future teachers and improve the quality of teaching.
4. **National Mission for Mentoring:** Teachers will be encouraged to become mentors and engage in peer-to-peer learning and development.

## **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

1. **Integration with Mainstream Education:** Vocational education will be integrated into the curriculum from the secondary stage.
2. **Skill Development:** A significant emphasis on preparing students for the workforce by focusing on practical skills, entrepreneurship, and employability.
3. **Partnerships with Industry:** Collaboration with industry partners to design vocational training programs and internships.
4. **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF):** Implementation of NSQF to standardize skill-based education.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS**

1. **Multidisciplinary Universities and Colleges:** Emphasis on creating large multidisciplinary institutions with broad-based courses across fields of study.
2. **Autonomy for Institutions:** Greater academic and administrative autonomy for higher educational institutions, especially for public universities.
3. **Regulation:** Creation of a single regulatory body for higher education (National Higher Education Regulatory Authority or NHERA), replacing multiple bodies.
4. **Increase GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio):** Target to achieve a GER of 50% by 2035 for higher education.
5. **Promoting Research:** It gives strong emphasis on research and innovation, including encouraging public-private partnerships and funding for research institutions.

## **DIGITAL EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

1. **Digital Infrastructure:** Development of robust digital infrastructure to support online learning, particularly in rural and remote areas.
2. **Technology-Enabled Learning:** Extensive use of online platforms, digital tools, and ed-tech to enhance learning experiences and access to education.
3. **National Educational Technology Forum (NETF):** A body to promote and regulate the use of technology in education.

### ***Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)***

ECCE's contribution to higher education is providing a strong foundation for lifelong learning that results in better academic performance, readiness for school, and the development of key social and emotional skills. Additionally, ECCE experience can provide pathways to specialized higher education for those who are considering a career in ECCE or related areas that require leadership in educational settings.

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- 1. Universal Access to ECCE:** NEP aims to provide quality early childhood care and education for all children in the age group of 3-6 years.
- 2. Integration with School System:** The curriculum for early childhood education will be aligned with the school system to ensure smooth transition from preschool to primary education.
- 3. Focus on Play-based Learning:** Emphasis on the holistic development of children through play, storytelling, and creative learning.

### ***Inclusive Education***

- 1. Special Needs Education:** Establishing frameworks and resources for children with disabilities or special learning needs to ensure they have access to quality education.
- 2. Scholarships and Support:** Ensuring that marginalized and underrepresented communities receive scholarships, support programs, and accessible infrastructure.
- 3. No Discrimination:** Creating a safe and inclusive educational environment where discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, disability, or socioeconomic background is eliminated.

### ***Governance and Management***

- 1. School Management:** Autonomy to schools to make decisions based on local needs, while ensuring accountability and transparency.
- 2. Decentralized Decision-Making:** It try to increased involvement of local communities in decision-making processes for school management and curriculum design.
- 3. Monitoring and Evaluation:** Strong mechanisms for monitoring the quality of education, including a focus on learning outcomes and implementation of reforms at local levels.

### ***Financing Education***

- 1. Increased Public Investment:** The policy emphasizes increasing public investment in education to 6% of GDP.
- 2. Public-Private Partnerships:** Promoting collaborations between government and private organizations to provide quality education and resources.
- 3. Inclusive Funding:** Ensuring that marginalized communities receive adequate funding for education-related programs.

### ***Provisions for Inclusion and Accessibility in Nep 2020***

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes accessibility as a fundamental principle for ensuring inclusive education in India. The policy tries to make education more accessible to all students related to whole society, particularly marginalized, disadvantaged, and differently-abled groups, ensuring equity in educational opportunities.

Here are the key provisions regarding inclusive education and accessibility in NEP 2020:

#### **1. Universal Access to Education**

- **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):** The policy stresses the importance of ensuring access to quality early childhood education for all children. The aim is to make pre-school education universally accessible by 2030.
- **Primary and Secondary Education:** NEP 2020 emphasizes improving access to quality schooling for all children, focusing on ensuring that no child is left behind, including those from rural, remote areas, and marginalized communities.

## **2. Inclusive Education for All**

- **Focus on Special Education Needs (SEN):** NEP 2020 envisions ensuring equal access to quality education for children with disabilities. This includes the development of specialized teaching methods and accessible infrastructure to support children with special needs.
- **Individualized Education Plans (IEPS):** For children with disabilities, the policy recommends the development of individualized education plans to cater to specific learning needs.

## **3. Support For Underrepresented Groups**

- The policy proposes measures to address the educational needs of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other marginalized communities.
- Scholarships, residential schools, and affirmative actions are suggested to provide more opportunities for these groups to access quality education.

## **4. Use of Technology to Bridge Gaps**

- **Digital Learning:** The NEP 2020 advocates for expanding the use of technology to make education more accessible, especially in remote areas. Initiatives such as virtual classrooms, digital content, and online learning platforms are emphasized.
- The policy calls for efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to digital learning resources.

## **5. Language And Accessibility**

- **Multilingual Education:** NEP 2020 promotes the use of mother-tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction, particularly in the early years, which can help make learning more accessible and relatable to students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

## **6. Flexible Learning Paths**

- The policy highlights the importance of providing flexible learning paths, including open and distance learning (ODL) options, as well as vocational education, to cater to different learning needs and preferences.
- The aim is to create learning environments that are adaptable to the diverse needs of students, whether they need additional support or alternative pathways to education.

## **7. Strengthening School Infrastructure**

- NEP 2020 calls for the creation of accessible school infrastructures, such as barrier-free classrooms, ramps, and accessible toilets for children with disabilities, ensuring physical accessibility to education.
- Schools are encouraged to provide appropriate learning materials and aids for children with disabilities.

## **8. Teacher Training and Sensitization**

- Teachers are to be trained in inclusive teaching practices to ensure that they can cater to diverse student needs, including those with disabilities or from marginalized communities.
- Sensitization programs are to be included in teacher training curricula to foster a more inclusive educational environment.

## **9. Assessment and Certification**

- The policy advocates for more inclusive and flexible assessment methods, ensuring that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged. This includes providing accommodations such as extra time or assistive technology during assessments.

## **10. Higher Education Accessibility**

- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** For higher education, NEP 2020 stresses the need to provide scholarships and financial aid to underrepresented and economically disadvantaged groups.
- **Inclusive Admission Policies:** It recommends that universities and colleges develop inclusive admission policies to ensure that students from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities for higher education.

### ***Recommendation of National Education Policy - 2020***

NEP 2020 has tried to influence every and all aspects of disability inclusion and their accessibility as titled “Equitable and Inclusive Education, focusing on challenges and issues faced by students and recommendations for reducing discriminations in access and participation of all students without. This policy tries to cover issues and recommendation for the access and inclusion of “Under-represented groups of students”. Policy includes this group under the Social Economical Disadvantage Groups without discrimination of gender, socio-culture, geographical and economical identity with disability. Policy also advocates the Right of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 for the provisions of Children with Special Needs. NEP 2020 recommend inclusive education and accessibility for equity. Equal participation and quality education. Some recommendations are as follows:

1. School must use the approach to inclusion by engagement of trained special educators, capacity building of teachers, and make resource centres, as well as provide teaching learning material and organize co-curricular activities like: Sports, Arts (Painting etc.) vocational education.
2. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan: It is a centre sponsored integrated scheme of the Ministry of Education for pre- primary to senior secondary school classes. This scheme has aims to access to quality school education in all states and UT’s.

### ***Some Important Links***

- **ePathshala:** <https://epathshala.nic.in/>
- **Textbooks:** <https://ciet.nic.in/pages.php?id=audiobook&ln=en&ln=en>
- **NCERT: Barkha Series** <https://ncert.nic.in/degsn/NCERTBarkhaseries/Start.html>
  - Priya the Accessibility Warrior: (<https://ncert.nic.in/ptaw.php>)
  - Everyone Needs Accessibility, Accessibility helps everyone: <https://ncert.nic.in/ptaw.php>
- **DIKSHA Portal:** [https://ncert.nic.in/ComicFlipBookEnglish/isl\\_dictionary/mobile/index.html](https://ncert.nic.in/ComicFlipBookEnglish/isl_dictionary/mobile/index.html)

### ***The Challenges in Providing Equitable Access and Inclusion to Quality Education***

1. Limited access to Quality Higher Education in rural and remote areas (Banodha, etc, 2022).
2. Economic constraints and inability to afford Higher Education.
3. Lack of Awareness and Guidance about Higher Education opportunities.
4. Discrimination and biases in Admission processes.
5. Insufficient Infrastructure and Resources in Institutions.

### ***Mitigating Strategies Enshrined in NEP 2020 for Ensuring Equitable and Quality Higher Education***

1. Increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035.
2. Promoting Vocational Education and Skill Development.
3. Setting up a National Educational Commission for Quality Assurance.
4. Encouraging International Collaboration and Research.
5. Providing Free Education for Girls and Other Marginalised Groups.

### **CONCLUSION**

A comprehensive, long-term plan to enhance India's educational system is NEP 2020. Making education more flexible, inclusive, and pertinent to the demands of the twenty-first century is its main goal. It seeks to revolutionize Indian education and give every child the chance to realize their full potential with the correct implementation. Strong coordination amongst stakeholders and adequate funding for resources, infrastructure, and teacher preparation are necessary for successful implementation, though. In order to guarantee that education is inclusive and equitable and that no one is left behind, NEP 2020 also places a high priority on accessibility. With a focus on underprivileged students, it promotes greater access to high-quality education for students from all socioeconomic, geographic, and physical backgrounds.

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