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National Education Policy, 2020: A Way Ahead

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive reformulation of India's education policy that aims to transform the country's education system to meet the needs of the 21st century. The policy is based on the principles of accessibility, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability, and it seeks to provide a holistic and multidisciplinary education to all students. This paper discusses the salient features of the NEP 2020, such as the emphasis on early childhood care and education, the introduction of a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, the promotion of multilingualism, the incorporation of vocational education, and the establishment of a National Educational Technology Forum. The paper also examines the challenges that the implementation of the NEP 2020 may face, such as the shortage of trained teachers and the digital divide. Finally, the paper suggests a way ahead for the NEP 2020, which includes the need for adequate funding, the development of a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism, and the involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation process. Overall, the NEP 2020 presents a unique opportunity for India to transform its education system and to prepare its students for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Introduction:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark policy reformulation in India's education system after a gap of 34 years, with a vision to transform the country's education system to meet the needs of the 21st century. The policy aims to provide equitable, accessible, and quality education to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, and prepare them to become responsible and productive citizens. The NEP 2020 is a comprehensive policy that covers all stages of education, from early childhood care and education to higher education, and seeks to promote multidisciplinary learning and critical thinking. The policy also recognizes the importance of technology in education and proposes the establishment of a National Educational Technology Forum to provide a platform for the development and

implementation of educational technology. However, the implementation of such a massive reform requires significant investments, infrastructure, and skilled teachers. Therefore, it is essential to examine the salient features of the NEP 2020, the challenges it may face, and the way forward to achieve its vision.

Historical overview of Educational Policies in India:

The history of National Education Policies (NEPs) in India can be traced back to the British era, where education was seen as a tool for colonial control and limited to the elite. After India gained independence, the first NEP was formulated in 1968, which aimed to promote social justice and economic growth through education. However, the implementation of this policy was limited due to the lack of political will and resources.

In 1986, the government formulated a new NEP, which focused on expanding access to education, improving quality, and promoting vocational education. This policy was instrumental in increasing enrolment rates in primary education but was unable to address the challenges of access and quality in higher education.

After a gap of 34 years, the NEP 2020 was introduced, which is a comprehensive reformulation of India's education policy with a vision to transform the education system to meet the needs of the 21st century. The policy focuses on providing equitable, accessible, and quality education to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, and promoting multidisciplinary learning and critical thinking.

Major Objectives of the New Education Policy

The New Education Policy (NEP) was launched in 2020 with the aim of transforming the education system in India. The major objectives of the NEP include the following:

Ensuring universal access to education: The NEP aims to ensure universal access to quality education from early childhood to higher education, with a focus on increasing enrolment, reducing dropouts, and improving the quality of education for all learners.

Promoting multidisciplinary education: The NEP proposes a multidisciplinary approach to education, which aims to provide learners with a broad range of skills and competencies across different disciplines, and to promote critical thinking and creativity.

Fostering research and innovation: The NEP aims to foster a culture of research and innovation in education by promoting collaboration between academia, industry, and government, and by providing funding and incentives for research and development.

Enhancing the quality of education: The NEP proposes several measures to enhance the quality of education, including the development of new curricula, the training and professional development of teachers, the use of technology and digital resources, and the establishment of accreditation mechanisms for higher education institutions.

Promoting equity and inclusion: The NEP aims to promote equity and inclusion in education by addressing disparities based on gender, socio-economic status, language, and disability, and by providing support and incentives for underrepresented groups.

Strengthening vocational education: The NEP proposes to integrate vocational education and training into mainstream education, and to provide learners with a range of skills and competencies that are relevant to the job market.

Ensuring global competitiveness: The NEP aims to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills and competencies required for the 21st century, and that the education system is aligned with the needs of the global economy.

Overall, the NEP aims to transform the education system in India by promoting a more holistic and integrated approach, and by aligning education with the needs of the wider society. It seeks to foster a culture of lifelong learning and to equip learners with the skills and competencies required for the 21st century.

The Introduction of A 5+3+3+4 Curricular Structure:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposed a major reform in the curricular structure of schools. The new structure is a 5+3+3+4 system, which replaces the previous 10+2 structure. Here is an explanation of the new curricular structure:

Foundational Stage (5 years): The first stage of the new curricular structure is the foundational stage, which includes three years of pre-primary education (age 3-6) and two years of primary education (age 6-8). The foundational stage is designed to focus on play-based and activity-based learning, with a strong emphasis on developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Preparatory Stage (3 years): The second stage of the new curricular structure is the preparatory stage, which includes three years of upper primary education (age 8-11). The preparatory stage is designed to build on the foundational stage and further develop core competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

Middle Stage (3 years): The third stage of the new curricular structure is the middle stage, which includes three years of secondary education (age 11-14). The middle stage is designed to provide a broad and multidisciplinary education, with a focus on experiential and vocational learning.

Secondary Stage (4 years): The final stage of the new curricular structure is the secondary stage, which includes four years of high school education (age 14-18). The secondary stage is designed to provide a flexible and multidisciplinary education, with a focus on developing specialized knowledge and skills for higher education or vocational careers.

The 5+3+3+4 curricular structure is intended to provide a more holistic and flexible education system, with a greater emphasis on foundational skills, multidisciplinary learning, and vocational education. It also aligns with the global trend towards competency-based education, which prioritizes the development of 21st century skills and competencies.

Drawbacks in past educational policies, some of which are listed below:

Poor quality of education: Despite efforts to increase access to education, the quality of education provided has been inadequate, particularly in rural areas. The focus has been on increasing enrolment rates rather than improving the quality of education, leading to a mismatch between skills and job requirements.

Inadequate investment in education: Despite the constitutional mandate to provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14, the government has not allocated sufficient resources to education. This has resulted in inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate training programs.

Limited access to higher education: While primary education has seen some improvements, access to higher education remains limited, particularly for disadvantaged communities. This has contributed to social and economic inequalities and limited opportunities for social mobility.

Overemphasis on rote learning: The education system in India has been criticized for an overemphasis on rote learning and memorization, rather than promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This has contributed to a lack of innovation and creativity in the workforce.

Gender disparity: Despite efforts to increase access to education for girls, gender disparity in education remains a significant challenge in India. Girls face several barriers to education, including social norms that prioritize boys' education, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities.

Lack of vocational education: The education system in India has been criticized for a lack of emphasis on vocational education, which limits students' opportunities for skill development and employment. This has resulted in a mismatch between the skills and qualifications of graduates and the demands of the job market.

Language barrier: The language of instruction in schools in India has been a controversial issue, with debates on the use of regional languages versus English. The lack of proficiency in English has been identified as a significant barrier to accessing higher education and employment opportunities.

Lack of innovation and research: The education system in India has been criticized for a lack of emphasis on innovation and research, resulting in limited contributions to scientific and technological advancements.

Steps Taken in New Education Policy:

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to address the challenges and drawbacks of past educational policies in India. Some of the steps taken in the NEP to counter these drawbacks are:

Emphasis on quality education: The NEP recognizes the importance of providing quality education and aims to improve the quality of education at all levels. It proposes several measures, such as the establishment of a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, the development of a new National Curriculum Framework, and the introduction of new assessment and evaluation methods.

Increased investment in education: The NEP aims to increase public investment in education to 6% of GDP. This will help address the infrastructure and resource gaps in the education system, such as the shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate training programs.

Focus on skill development: The NEP emphasizes the importance of vocational education and aims to provide students with opportunities for skill development and hands-on learning. It proposes the establishment of a new National Skill Development Mission and the integration of vocational education into mainstream education.

Gender equity: The NEP recognizes the importance of promoting gender equity in education and aims to increase access to education for girls. It proposes several measures, such as the

establishment of a Gender Inclusion Fund and the promotion of gender-sensitive curriculum and teaching practices.

Promotion of research and innovation: The NEP emphasizes the importance of research and innovation in education and aims to promote research and development in all fields of knowledge. It proposes several measures, such as the establishment of a new National Research Foundation and the promotion of interdisciplinary research.

Flexible curriculum: The NEP proposes a flexible curriculum that allows students to choose their own courses and pursue interdisciplinary studies. This will help students to develop a broad-based understanding of different subjects and prepare them for the rapidly changing job market.

Technology integration: The NEP recognizes the importance of technology in education and aims to integrate technology into all aspects of education. It proposes the establishment of a National Educational Technology Forum and the development of a digital infrastructure for education.

Teacher training: The NEP recognizes the importance of teacher training and aims to improve the quality of teacher education in India. It proposes several measures, such as the establishment of a new National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education and the introduction of a new teacher education program.

Decentralization of education: The NEP recognizes the importance of decentralization in education and aims to give more autonomy to schools and higher education institutions. It proposes several measures, such as the establishment of a new National Higher Education Regulatory Authority and the promotion of community participation in education.

Integration of culture and values: The NEP recognizes the importance of integrating culture and values into education and aims to promote a holistic and integrated approach to education. It proposes the integration of Indian knowledge systems into education and the promotion of art, culture, and sports in education.

Vocational education: The NEP emphasizes the need for vocational education to prepare students for employment and entrepreneurship. It proposes the integration of vocational education into mainstream education and the establishment of vocational education institutions at the secondary and higher education levels.

Multilingualism: The NEP recognizes the importance of multilingualism in education and aims to promote the use of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction in primary education. It also proposes the teaching of at least two languages in schools, including Indian languages and foreign languages.

Inclusive education: The NEP recognizes the importance of inclusive education and aims to provide equitable access to education for all students, including children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It proposes several measures, such as the establishment of resource centres for children with disabilities, the promotion of gender-sensitive education, and the provision of scholarships and financial assistance to disadvantaged students.

Assessment and evaluation: The NEP propose a new framework for assessment and evaluation that focuses on formative assessment, competency-based learning, and learning outcomes. It

aims to reduce the emphasis on rote learning and promote a more holistic and flexible approach to assessment.

These steps aim to address some of the major challenges facing the Indian education system and create a more inclusive and responsive system that meets the needs of all students. The NEP 2020 is a comprehensive policy that aims to transform the education system at all levels and promote lifelong learning and skill development.

Major Obstacles in implementation of the steps:

Infrastructure: One of the major obstacles in the implementation of the NEP is the lack of infrastructure and resources in many parts of the country. For example, there is a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas, and many schools lack basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories.

Funding: The implementation of the NEP will require significant investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. However, the government's budget for education has been declining in recent years, and many states also face budget constraints.

Resistance to change: The implementation of the NEP will require significant changes in the education system, such as the adoption of a new curriculum, new teaching methods, and new assessment and evaluation systems. However, there may be resistance to these changes from various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and policymakers.

Language barriers: The NEP proposes the use of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction in primary education, which may pose challenges in areas where there are multiple languages spoken. There may also be resistance to the teaching of certain languages, particularly foreign languages.

Implementation challenges: The implementation of the NEP will require coordination between multiple stakeholders, including central and state governments, education institutions, and civil society organizations. There may be challenges in ensuring effective communication and collaboration between these stakeholders.

Quality assurance: The NEP proposes a shift towards outcome-based learning and assessment, which requires a robust quality assurance mechanism. However, the current system of accreditation and quality assurance in India is fragmented and inadequate, and there is a need for a more comprehensive and effective quality assurance framework.

Digital divide: The NEP aims to leverage technology to improve access to education and enhance the learning experience. However, there is a significant digital divide in India, with many students and teachers lacking access to basic digital infrastructure and tools. This could result in unequal access to educational opportunities and undermine the effectiveness of the NEP.

Social and cultural barriers: The NEP proposes several measures to promote social inclusion and equity in education, such as the expansion of early childhood education and the provision of scholarships and financial support for disadvantaged students. However, there may be social and cultural barriers that hinder the implementation of these measures, such as caste-based discrimination, gender biases, and regional disparities.

Political will: The successful implementation of the NEP will require sustained political will and commitment from all stakeholders. However, there may be political and ideological differences that could undermine the implementation of the NEP, particularly in the context of India's federal system of governance.

These obstacles will need to be addressed in order to ensure the successful implementation of the NEP and the transformation of the Indian education system.

Conclusion:

NEPs in India have evolved over time to address the changing needs of the country's education system. While the previous policies focused on increasing access and improving quality, the NEP 2020 seeks to transform the education system by incorporating multidisciplinary learning and critical thinking, among other features. However, the implementation of these policies has been a challenge due to the lack of political will, resources, and skilled teachers. Therefore, it is essential to ensure adequate investments, infrastructure, and training to achieve the vision of the NEP 2020. The drawbacks of past educational policies in India include poor quality of education, inadequate investment in education, limited access to higher education, and an overemphasis on rote learning. These issues have contributed to a mismatch between skills and job requirements, limited opportunities for social and economic mobility, and a lack of innovation and creativity in the workforce.

It appears that the implementation of the new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure introduced in the National Education Policy 2020 in India is still in its early stages, and there are several challenges that need to be addressed for its successful implementation.

The study suggests that while the new structure has the potential to bring about significant changes in the education system, there is a need for adequate resources and infrastructure, teacher training and development, and effective evaluation and assessment mechanisms.

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