



Evolution of National Education Policies (1968, 1986 and 2020) in India with Reference to Higher Education

Dr. Ranjini Ghosh

Assistant Professor (WBES)

Government College of Education, Burdwan, West Bengal, India

Abstract- Education plays a transformative role in nation-building, socio-economic development, cultural integration, and human resource development. Since independence, India has attempted to reform its educational system through various policy frameworks to address emerging national and global needs. The present paper critically analyses the evolution of educational policies in India with special reference to the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, National Policy on Education 1986 with Programme of Action (1992), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study particularly focuses on higher education reforms, comparing the philosophical foundations, objectives, structural changes, and implementation strategies of these policies. The paper adopts a qualitative and theoretical methodology based on secondary data collected from books, research journals, policy documents, reports, and official government publications. The findings reveal that NPE 1968 emphasized national integration, equal educational opportunity, and scientific development; NPE 1986 focused on universalization, equity, teacher education, and modernization; while NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, research orientation, digitalization, and global competitiveness. The study concludes that NEP 2020 represents a transformative shift in Indian higher education, though successful implementation requires adequate funding, teacher preparation, infrastructure development, and policy coordination.

Keywords- Circular economy, sustainable fashion, textile recycling, Fiber innovation, artificial intelligence, fashion supply chain.

I. Introduction

Education is regarded as one of the most significant instruments for social transformation and national development. In a democratic country like India, education plays a crucial role in fostering equality, scientific temper, social justice, national integration, and economic progress. Since independence, the Indian education system has undergone several reforms aimed at addressing socio-economic inequalities and preparing citizens for changing global demands (Rao, 2022).

The need for a comprehensive educational framework led to the formulation of the first National Policy on Education in 1968 based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964–66). The policy aimed to promote equal educational opportunities, national integration, and modernization of education. Subsequently, the National Policy on Education 1986 was introduced to address issues of access, equity, teacher education, adult literacy, and modernization. It was later revised through the Programme of Action (POA) in 1992 (Basuri, 2023; Rao, 2022).



After more than three decades, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy 2020 as a comprehensive reformative policy designed to transform the Indian education system according to twenty-first-century requirements. NEP 2020 emphasizes flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, research, innovation, technology integration, vocational education, and internationalization of higher education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the major features of NPE 1968, NPE 1986, and NEP 2020.
2. To identify the major challenges and opportunities associated with NEP 2020.
3. To evaluate the implications of educational reforms on higher education in India.

II. Methodology

The present study is qualitative and theoretical in nature. The paper is based on secondary sources of data such as government reports, policy documents, books, journal articles, research papers, and official educational websites. Descriptive and comparative methods have been used to analyze the educational policies and their implications for higher education.

Discussion:

The study highlights that NEP 2020 represents a transformative shift in Indian higher education by integrating flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, research orientation, and digital advancement while building upon the foundational principles of NPE 1968 and NPE 1986.

National Policy on Education 1968-

The National Policy on Education 1968 was the first comprehensive educational policy of independent India. It was formulated based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission. The major objectives of NPE 1968 were promotion of national integration, equalization of educational opportunity, development of scientific temper, modernization of education, improvement of teacher status, and expansion of educational facilities.

One of the significant recommendations of NPE 1968 was the Three-Language Formula, which aimed to promote linguistic harmony and national integration. The policy also emphasized free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 years. NPE 1968 recommended increasing educational expenditure to 6% of national income and stressed the importance of science and mathematics education (Sundaram, 2020).

National Policy on Education 1986 and Programme of Action 1992-

The National Policy on Education 1986 was introduced to address the limitations of NPE 1968 and to modernize the education system according to contemporary needs. The policy emphasized universalization of elementary education, equal educational opportunities, women's education, adult education, vocationalization, teacher education, educational technology, and removal of disparities.



The policy proposed autonomous colleges, refresher courses for teachers, interdisciplinary learning, and research fellowships. The Programme of Action (1992) further revised and strengthened the policy by focusing on institutional expansion, redesigning courses, and quality improvement.

National Education Policy 2020-

The National Education Policy 2020 is considered one of the most comprehensive educational reforms in independent India. It aims to transform India into a global knowledge superpower. The policy is based on the pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability.

NEP 2020 introduces multidisciplinary education, multiple entry and exit systems, Academic Bank of Credits, four-year undergraduate programmes, research-oriented education, digital learning, vocational integration, and internationalization. The policy also proposes the establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) and the National Research Foundation (NRF).

Comparative Analysis:

NPE 1968 primarily focused on national integration, equality, and modernization. NPE 1986 emphasized democratization and social justice. NEP 2020 adopts a holistic and multidisciplinary approach aligned with global educational trends.

While NPE 1968 and NPE 1986 focused more on access and equity, NEP 2020 emphasizes flexibility, innovation, critical thinking, employability, and research culture. Technology integration and digital learning are major strengths of NEP 2020.

Table: Glance of the Recommendations of National Education Policies of India on Higher Education

| Aspect | NEP 1968 | NPE 1986 | NEP 2020 |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Expansion of Higher Education | Emphasized expansion of educational institutions and equal opportunities in higher education. | Focused on consolidation and expansion of institutions and development of autonomous colleges. | Aims to increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035 through multidisciplinary institutions. |
| Curriculum Structure | Focused on national development and scientific temper. | Encouraged specialization, flexibility, and interdisciplinary programmes. | Introduced holistic and multidisciplinary curriculum with flexible course structures. |
| Degree Structure | Conventional degree system with limited flexibility. | Three-year honours/pass bachelor degree and two-year master degree. | Multiple entry-exit system: certificate, diploma, degree, and degree with research. |
| Research and Innovation | Encouraged scientific research and national development. | Promoted research and fellowship programmes for quality improvement. | Proposed National Research Foundation (NRF) and research universities. |
| Teacher Education | Emphasized improvement of teacher quality and professional standards. | Orientation, refresher courses, and pedagogical training for teachers. | Four-year integrated B.Ed. and continuous professional development. |



| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Governance and Regulation | Central and state coordination in educational planning. | UGC remained the regulatory body for higher education. | Proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as a single regulator. |
| Technology Integration | Very limited due to technological constraints. | Introduced educational technology gradually. | Strong emphasis on digital learning, MOOCs, SWAYAM, and online education. |
| Language Policy | Promotion of regional languages and three-language formula. | Encouraged local language teaching in some HEIs. | Promoted multilingualism and Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI). |
| Vocational and Skill Education | Discussed vocational education at basic level. | Greater emphasis on skill-oriented and vocational education. | Integration of vocational education into mainstream higher education. |
| Student Flexibility | Limited flexibility in course choice and mobility. | Flexible curriculum but no credit transfer system. | Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) and credit transfer system introduced. |
| Access and Equity | Focused on equal educational opportunities. | Emphasized access for disadvantaged groups and universalization. | Inclusive education with equity, affordability, and accessibility. |
| Quality Improvement | Highlighted maintenance of educational standards. | Focused on quality improvement and teacher efficiency. | Outcome-based education, autonomy, innovation, and global standards. |

Challenges in Implementation and Suggestions:

Despite its transformative vision, NEP 2020 faces several challenges including financial constraints, digital divide, lack of teacher preparedness, infrastructural limitations, language issues, and coordination among educational agencies. Rural educational institutions particularly face difficulties in implementing digital and multidisciplinary reforms (Dhoke. 2021; Soni 2023).

The following suggestions may enhance the effective implementation and long-term success of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India;

1. Adequate funding should be ensured for effective implementation of NEP 2020.
2. Teacher training programmes should be strengthened.
3. Rural educational infrastructure must be improved.
4. Digital literacy and internet accessibility should be expanded.
5. Research grants and innovation ecosystems should be promoted.

III. Conclusion

Educational policies in India have evolved significantly from NPE 1968 to NEP 2020. While NPE 1968 focused on national integration and equal opportunity, NPE 1986 emphasized democratization, equity, and modernization. NEP 2020 represents a paradigm shift toward holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, and research-oriented education. The policy promotes innovation, critical thinking, employability, and



lifelong learning. However, the success of the policy largely depends on effective implementation, financial investment, institutional preparedness, and teacher empowerment.

References

1. Basuri, J. (2023). A comparative analysis of NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 on higher education. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 11(8), 728–733.
2. Chatterjee, A., Das, T., & Nandi, A. (2023). Students' knowledge on National Education Policy 2020 at higher education level. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 9(8), 184–196.
3. Chowdhury, M. I. B. (2023). Implementation of educational policy (NEP 2020): Challenges and opportunities in higher education in India. *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 9(6), 286–288.
4. Dhoke, B. R. (2021). Comparative study of old (1986) and new (2020) national education policy. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 7(2).
5. Government of India. (1968). *National Policy on Education 1968*. Ministry of Education.
6. Government of India. (1986). *National Policy on Education 1986*. Ministry of Human Resource Development.
7. Government of India. (1992). *Programme of Action 1992*. Ministry of Human Resource Development.
8. Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education.
9. Kothari, D. S. (1966). *Education and national development: Report of the Education Commission (1964–66)*. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
10. Rao, L. P. (2022). National educational policies in India. *Sumedha Journal of Management*, 11(2), 56–62.
11. Soni, A. (2023). Impact of NEP-2020 on higher education. *International Journal of Formal Education*, 2(8), 109–124.
12. Sundaram, M. K. (2020). National Education Policy 1986 vs National Education Policy 2020: A comparative study. *International Research Journal on Advanced Science Hub*, 2(10S), 127–131.