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## **Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in India- New Education Policy 2020**

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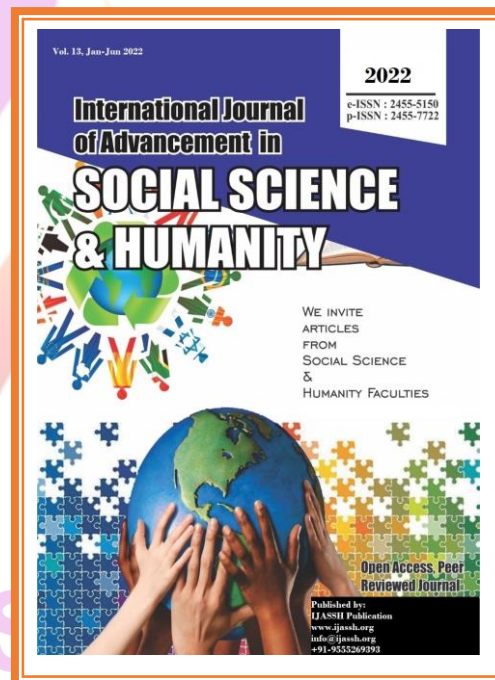
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**ABSTRACT**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development formed a Committee chaired by Dr K. Kasturirangan for preparing the National Education Policy. The Committee was constituted in June 2017. The Committee submitted its report on May 31, 2019. *The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive framework for the development of education in India. It was announced by the Government of India in July 2020, aiming to transform the Indian education system by 2040. The NEP 2020 replaces the National Policy on Education, 1986.*

**INTRODUCTION:**

After the Independence, The Indian Government implemented variety of programmes to address the problems of illiteracy in both rural and urban India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Minister of Education, envisaged strong central government control over uniform education system education throughout the country. The government of India established the University Education Commission in 1948-49. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), University Grants Commission and the Kothari Commission (1964-66) to develop proposals to modernise India's education system. The National Policy on Education was formulated by Indian Government to promote and regulate education system in India. The policy covers elementary education to higher education in both rural and urban India. The first NPE was promulgated by the Government of India by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1968, the second by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 and the third policy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020. 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. The National Education Policy as submitted by the Kasturirangan Committee

submitted an education policy that seeks to address the following challenges facing the existing education system:

1. Quality
2. Affordability
3. Equity
4. Access
5. Accountability

The policy provides for reforms at all levels of education from school to higher education.

- NEP aims to increase the focus on strengthening teacher training, reforming the existing exam system, early childhood care and restructuring the regulatory framework of education.
- Other intentions of the NEP includes like Increasing public investment in education, Setting up NEC (National Education Commission), Increasing focus on vocational and adult education and Strengthening the use of technology, etc.

*NEP 2020 and Higher Education in India:* The policy covers all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education. In the context of higher education, NEP 2020 introduces several significant changes and reforms to improve the quality, accessibility, and relevance of higher education in India. Here are some

key aspects of NEP 2020 related to higher education:

1. **Multidisciplinary Education and Flexibility:** NEP 2020 emphasizes multidisciplinary education, allowing students to choose a diverse range of subjects across disciplines. It promotes flexibility in choosing courses and allows students to select minors, majors, and electives from different domains. *Breaking the rigid boundaries between arts and sciences, curricular and extracurricular activities, vocational and academic streams, etc. It encourages the students to choose a combination of subjects of their choices.*
2. **Academic Credit Bank and Multiple Entry-Exit Points:** The policy proposes the establishment of an Academic Credit Bank, which allows students to store and transfer credits earned from different institutions. It introduces multiple entry and exit points, enabling students to enter and exit higher education programs based on their learning needs and circumstances. For example, a student can earn a certificate after completing one year, a diploma after two years, and a degree after three or four years.
3. **Quality Enhancement:** NEP 2020 focuses on improving the quality of education by setting up a National Research Foundation (NRF) to fund and promote research in higher education institutions. It aims to enhance the quality of teaching through better faculty training, development programs, and continuous performance evaluation. *Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to be set up as a single overarching umbrella body for the entire higher education, excluding medical and legal education.*
4. **Promotion of Regional Languages:** The policy advocates for the promotion of education in regional languages, both as a medium of instruction and as a subject of study. This is aimed at preserving and promoting India's linguistic diversity.
5. **Global Collaboration and Institutional Autonomy:** NEP 2020 encourages higher education institutions to collaborate with foreign institutions, allowing for greater exposure to international best practices and research. It emphasizes granting more autonomy to colleges and universities, enabling them to make decisions regarding academic and administrative matters.
6. **Technology Integration:** The policy promotes the integration of technology in teaching and learning processes, including online education and digital resources, to enhance the accessibility of quality education. It aims to *increased use of technology in teaching, learning, and assessment. The creation of a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning and administration.*
7. **Financial Support and Scholarships:** NEP 2020 aims to

increase public investment in education and offers financial support to economically disadvantaged students through scholarships and other means.

8. *Research and Innovation: National Research Foundation to fund, coordinate, and promote research in the country. Focus on creating a culture of research and innovation in higher educational institutions.*
9. **Assessment Reforms:** The policy advocates for a shift from rote learning to a more holistic and continuous evaluation system. It focuses on assessing students' understanding, application of knowledge, and critical thinking skills.

It's important to note that the successful implementation of NEP 2020 requires collaborative efforts from the central and state governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. As of my last update in September 2021, some of these reforms might have been implemented or might be in the process of implementation. For the most recent and specific developments regarding NEP 2020 and higher education in India, I recommend referring to official government sources or recent educational publications

#### *Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in India:*

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India places significant emphasis on equity and inclusion in higher education. It aims to address historical disparities and provide equal opportunities to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, caste, or religion.

Here are some key ways in which NEP 2020 focuses on promoting equity and inclusion in higher education:

1. **Social Inclusion:** NEP 2020 acknowledges the importance of social inclusion and aims to increase the participation of underprivileged and marginalized communities in higher education. It advocates for the setting up of special education zones in disadvantaged regions to ensure that all students have access to quality education.
2. **Gender Inclusivity:** The policy promotes gender inclusivity and aims to ensure equal participation of women in higher education by offering scholarships, mentorship programs, and support for female students. It encourages the establishment of women's hostels and special support for female students, especially in fields where they are underrepresented.
3. **Special Education Zones:** NEP 2020 proposes the creation of Special Education Zones in regions with a high concentration of historically marginalized groups. These zones are designed to focus on the educational development of socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
4. **Scholarships and Financial Support:** The policy advocates for extensive scholarship programs and financial support to students from economically weaker sections, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other marginalized communities. It encourages the private sector to provide scholarships to students in need,

fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

5. **Multilingual Education: NEP 2020** promotes education in regional languages, ensuring that students from non-English speaking backgrounds can access higher education without language barriers. This promotes inclusivity among diverse linguistic communities.
6. **Special Focus on Tribal Communities:** The policy recognizes the unique challenges faced by tribal communities and proposes special initiatives and support systems to ensure their participation and retention in higher education.
7. **Inclusive Curriculum: NEP 2020** advocates for an inclusive and diverse curriculum that reflects the cultural, social, and regional diversity of India. This helps in making education more relatable and accessible to students from various backgrounds.
8. **Special Attention to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs):** The policy emphasizes the need for accessible infrastructure and support services for persons with disabilities in higher education institutions. This includes provisions for assistive technologies, ramps, and other facilities to ensure their active participation.
9. **Flexible Learning and Multiple Entry-Exit Points:** By introducing flexibility in learning and multiple entry-exit points, NEP 2020 caters to the diverse learning needs of students. This accommodates students who might have to take

breaks in their education due to various reasons.

NEP 2020 aims to create a more inclusive and equitable higher education system in India by addressing the needs of marginalized communities, promoting gender inclusivity, providing financial support, and ensuring that education is accessible to all, regardless of their background.

The need for a change in education system in India has been felt for a long time. However, this feeling became stronger during the Covid-19 pandemic when we saw how students from disadvantaged groups suffered as we moved to an online model of learning. Integration of special needs children with other groups was emphasised in both the Programme of Action (1992) and the National Policy on Education (1986). "To integrate the physically and mentally challenged with the general population as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth, and to enable them to confront life with courage and confidence," was the stated goal. The same has also been discussed in National Curriculum Framework of 2005, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and other initiatives. However, new ways of imagining this integration were needed. This is where New Education Policy comes in. Having said that, what we can see that various policy documents have outlined the need for inclusive education. But the questions remain if we have achieved anything significant in this direction? As mentioned above, Covid-19 exposed many limitations in our education system. There were reports of disabled students not being able to access education as the online learning mode wasn't equipped for their needs. Students from

economically disadvantaged groups also suffered the most during this period. While, female students also were left behind their male counterparts. Therefore, we can safely say that there is an immediate need for change in education system in India and make it more inclusive. The NEP education system may or may not be able to address this. Its success depends on various other factors.

### **New Education Policy: Advantages & Disadvantages**

While New Education Policy advantages are many, how it recognizes and defines the need of inclusion in education is commendable. Females make up at least half of each of the four Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) designated within NEP 2020, which appears to have taken into account the fact that female students face additional disadvantages.

The other advantages of NEP are that it looks at education from a 21st century lens. It aims to integrate technology and entrepreneurship in education and make the best of all the resources that we have at our disposal.

The adoption of local or regional language as the medium of instruction under NEP 2020 assures that language is no longer a barrier for kids. Additionally, special educators must be hired by schools to meet the academic demands of students with special needs. So, there are a range of advantages of the New Education Policy. But are there any disadvantages? It would be wrong to use the phrase 'New Education Policy disadvantages' because the policy aims to achieve positive change. However, we can certainly say that what's needed is to go beyond the framework and work on actual implementation on the

ground. As we have seen, the issue of inequity has been addressed in various other policies in the past but what can make New Education Policy different is how its guidelines are implemented. There has also been criticism of the policy on various fronts. One of the criticism being the policy does not focus on Dalit and Adivasi communities specifically. The critique is also on related to language and the need for reforming the curriculum to make it more inclusive. Children in private schools will start learning English much earlier than pupils in government institutions, according to NEP 2020, Government school students will be instructed in the academic curriculum in their original regional tongues. This might further polarise the student body.

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