

OCCASIONAL PAPER

Perspectives in Indian Development

New Series

71

Access to Excellence: The Vision of the National Education Policy 2020

J. S. Rajput

Senior Atal Fellow, PMML



Centre for Contemporary Studies

Prime Ministers Museum and Library

2025

©J S Rajput2025

All rights reserved. No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author. The Occasional Paper should not be reported as representing the views of the PMML. The views expressed in this Occasional Paper are those of the author(s) and speakers and do not represent those of the PMML or PMML policy, or PMML staff, fellows, trustees, advisory groups, or any individual or organizations that provide support to the PMML Society nor are they endorsed by PMML. Occasional Papers describe research by the author(s) and are published to elicit comments and to further debate. Questions regarding the content of individual Occasional Papers should be directed to the authors, PMML will not be liable for any civil or criminal liability arising out of the statements made herein.

Published by

Prime Ministers Museum and Library

Teen Murti House

New Delhi- 110011

E-mail: director.nmml@gov.in

ISBN: 978-93-84793-57-9

Access to Excellence: The Vision of the National Education Policy 2020¹

J. S. Rajput

Abstract

This paper attempts a comprehensive overview of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), that envisions a national education system 'rooted to Indian ethos', and active participation in creating new knowledge and its utilization. It also analyses some of the emerging challenges before the implementers of the policy. A brief recall of the previous policies, implementations, and outcomes is included. The experiences gained have been found helpful and supportive in analysing the NEP-2020 recommendations, particularly in the context of curriculum changes, teacher preparation, language learning, it finds adequate intent of developing a cohesive national commitment to inculcate a strong sense of compassion, curiosity, and cultural grounding amongst the future generations. The present study finds that the policy has sufficient strength and vision to transform India into a developed society over the next three decades, provided the implementers remain conscious of the significance of social, cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious factors to create an integrated, cohesive futuristic society. It would also be a knowledge-based digital super power.

Key words: Indian Education System, Compassion and Curiosity in learning, Future-ready education, Value-based education, Language learning, Teacher preparation, Policy implementation.

The context

Independent India began its new journey in extremely excruciating circumstances; the partition made the new nation rise in the pain and agony of unprecedented human suffering. Poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and social and cultural issues of exclusion, were only a part of the huge plethora of issues that were to be confronted by the new rulers. They, obviously rose from struggle and agitation, and had yet to learn how to run a nation. They did marvelously well—they were men of truth, devotion, and committed to the nation and its people, who had sacrificed all they could for the nation. Here were men and women of foresight. In 1922, Gandhi ji wrote in a letter (Gandhi & Khiple, 1947):

We should remember that immediately on the attainment of freedom our people are not going to secure happiness. As we become independent, all the defects of the system of elections, injustice, the tyranny of the richer classes as also the burden of running administration are bound to come upon us. People would begin to feel that during those days, there was more justice, there was better administration, there was peace, and there was honesty to a great extent among the administrators compared to the days after independence. The only benefit of independence, however, would be that we would get rid of slavery and the blot of insult resulting there from.

As always, first he poses the problem and then comes out with a very clear solution. In this instance, his foresight is obvious to everyone, but one must attempt to find out the depth of his understanding of India, and Indians:

But there is hope, if education spreads throughout the country. From that people would develop from their childhood qualities of pure conduct, God fearing, love. Swaraj would give us happiness only when we attain success in the task. Otherwise, India would become the abode for grave injustice and tyranny of the rulers.

¹ This paper is a revised version of the public lecture delivered at PMML, New Delhi on 12 March 2025.

I have not come across the history of any other freedom struggle among all colonized nations that got their independence in the 20th century where so much attention was given to education; even prior to achieving independence! We were at 18% literacy, 27.16 for males, and 8.86 for females! Imagine how impossible and improbable it must have been then for most of the Indians to think of a knowledge society, space sciences, and nuclear and atomic power at par with the most developed nations!

After nearly five-decades, as India was readying to transition to the third millennium, we had several achievements to our credit in the education sector. The overall literacy rate was 65.38; males at 75.85 and females at 56.16! It happened in spite of the fact that independent India inherited an alien transplanted system of education whose primary objective was to impart education to Indians to prepare them for lower-level jobs in which the British were not interested. At the policy level, this system also had a covert agenda: spreading the superiority of the English language, Christianity, and the western culture, history, and heritage that could establish the whites as a superior race in contrast to the 'Black Indians'. Religious conversions were not a part of the ancient Indian tradition and culture. These were introduced—mostly forcefully by the Islamic invaders earlier, and subsequently, by the Christian missionaries that landed in India with a well-identified goal. The declared agenda of the missionaries was that they had come all the way to India to '*salvage the souls of the savages*'! They showed keen interest in educating the people, giving them some form of support in day-to-day lives, with little interest in getting acquainted with Indian tradition of knowledge quest. These were mostly presented—even dramatized—as evil that must be discarded, and replaced by all that was western. Thus, the deliberately neglected Indian tradition of knowledge quest and education, it suffered immensely, although because of its inherent strength, it survived. There could be considerable discussion on the positives and negatives of the transplanted model, but it may not be the right place for it in the present context.

Independent India also inherited the unbearable pain of partition, solely because of communal hardliners. Personal ambitions crept in, and shunned away all that could have been logical and rational. It was destined to be an unsuccessful attempt even when it was being finalized. We are told that if Jinnah was offered the Prime Ministership, partition would not have happened. Gandhi probably was willing, but the other aspirant was not! You cannot talk of education independent of the socio-cultural and religious context. Partition happened. It led to unprecedented violence, butchery, and massive displacement of population. It created hatred and bitterness. It ruined the cohesion between the two major communities developed over past several centuries, despite sporadic instances of bitterness and clashes which of course had historic reasons behind it. But the fact was that the two communities had learnt to live together! This harmony was broken by the communalisation of politics generated under the infamous *Two-Nation Theory*. The malicious misadventure was duly supported by a small section of Muslims, overtly the British relished it as it was in their own interests. It was finally laid to rest in 1971.

In any deliberation on education policy, in any context, one should be referring to the future, not the past. However, one intends to do so, because of the firm belief that to understand Indian education and not an attempt only to envision its future, which is most significant, its glorious past must also be known to every Indian. Who would not like to know his roots? This was most succinctly and beautifully articulated by Gandhi when he referred to open doors and windows for fresh air! (Gandhi, 1945): 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my

windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.' In the general context of the education policy formulation, and in the particular context of the National Education Policy 2020, not only it has a futuristic message but also a solution for the emerging policy webs. The nation needs to remain united, integrated and assured that every child gets an education of the same quality and is prepared for the future without suffering any debilitating differences. The partition trauma has still not been forgotten by people who were impacted by it. As the maximum sufferers were the children and women it had serious implications for education, particularly in terms of national integration and religious cohesion. '*Sarva Bhut Hite Ratah*': (Gandhi, 1945)

**सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु, मा कश्चित् दुःखभाग् भवेत्।।**

Let all be happy

Let all be free from diseases

Let all see auspicious things

Let no body suffer from grief.

Yes, it represents India, the Indian tradition of knowledge, and the universality of human kind: *Loka: Samast: Sukhino Bhavantu*: (Sanskrit Proverb, n.d.)

सर्वजनाः सुखिनो भवन्तु।

Let all people be happy

Think of the children who came to India, forced out from their ancestral homes divided in two portions re-designated as East and West Pakistan. They were made to stay in the refugee camps having lost everything that is necessary to lead a life with minimum support systems. Many of them had lost their parents and members of the family early on. In the last five decades these expressions have not been voiced in conversations as before not because their relevance has diminished but the hapless displaced had been integrated within the larger community, especially through education and reached the pinnacle of their profession.

In the field of education, I have come across several such individuals but would like to mention two names who came in the most depressing conditions. One was Prof. S. N. Saraf who rose to the position of vice chancellor in two universities and made several contributions to education policy formulations, and the second was Prof. J. L. Azad who rose to become the Chief of Education in the Planning Commission and became one of the best-known experts in educational financing. Professor C.L Ananad became the first vice-chancellor of the Arunachal university, and made outstanding contributions to the educational planning in India.

The festivities of independence had lost their verve, joy, and celebratory environs primarily because of the partition tragedy. It had created socio-religious and communal wedges that somehow persist to some extent even now. With all the challenges of *Roti, Kapda, and Makan* before the majority of the population, the Indian leadership was convinced that the way out from such a depressing situation is only the universalisation of elementary education. As one reflects on the past, it appears that a bold decision that the constitution makers included as Article 45 under the directive principles in the constitution in 1950 (Constitution of India, Article 45): *The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years*, ensured a strong foundation for lifelong learning for the child and went a long way to alleviate, if not eradicate, educational deficiency.

It no longer remains a mere directive principle but has become one of the fundamental rights through the 88th constitution amendment Act of 2009 which puts the right to education in the following words (88th Constitution Amendment Act of 2009): *The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State, may by law determine.*

It was launched with the usual fanfare on April 01, 2010, and was supposed to bring every child within its fold by 30 March 2013. One could repeat that it also made the system more alert and active, of course within the familiar limits and level of its systemic efficiency. Whatever the policy, its content and intent, it is finally the work culture and the motivational level that could be achieved by the leadership at every stage that makes or unmakes the expected difference.

How to go ahead

Before one enters the arena of the education policy formulations, it is desirable to recall the great tradition of knowledge quest of ancient India that reached even the shores of countries beyond. And that was possible only because it had great institutions like Taxila, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, Nalanda, and several others. India was acknowledged as the greatest centre for knowledge creation and transfer to new generations. Even when libraries were burnt and institutions destroyed by illiterate and ignorant, ruthless invaders, the tradition of knowledge quests continued to survive and flourish. Based upon this inherent strength, the Indian culture, tradition, and civilisation have survived all types of onslaughts by those who did not understand the value of knowledge and wisdom and also from those who were cunning enough to attempt the imposition of their culture, tradition, and language.

In this background, and particularly the ten-year constitutional directive, the sudden expansion of the system of education was a great responsibility of the government of the day. Though the target mandated in this constitution remains unfulfilled even now, the attempts initiated and inspired by the directive deserves every appreciation. With an illiteracy rate of around 18%, we are now touching 80%. This trend becomes far more significant when one considers that during the intervening period, the population of the country has risen from 36 crores to over 140 crores. Everyone is familiar with the diversity that this country is blessed with in terms of its geographical terrain, climatic variations, various faiths and religions, numerous linguistic traditions, and cultural advancements. There was no alternative for policymakers than to think of a three-phase strategy: provide access, ensure participation, and strive to focus on learner achievements—in that order. It is in these three phases that educational advancement in India has developed.

Let us also remember that the initial phase was, *why educate?* Next, *why educate girls?* And now the challenge before the policymakers and implementers is: we need *good quality education and skill acquisition in a good school for both the boys and girls.* This attitudinal transformation itself is a great achievement. All this was achieved in spite of the fact that the focus after independence was on higher education, and not elementary education. In the post-independence period, the first major step in education policy formulation was the appointment of the Radhakrishnan Commission in 1948. It gave great suggestions, and India is today well-equipped with institutions of repute and relevance in every area of higher education.

Next step was the appointment of the Mudaliar Commission in 1952. It was only in 1964 that the National Commission on Education was appointed to look at the future education policy for India in totality. Eminent physicist, Gandhian and spiritualist Dr. D.S. Kothari was

appointed its chairperson, and we refer to the Commission Report (1964-66) generally as the Kothari Commission Report. It led to the 1968 National Policy on Education; NPE-1968, the first full-fledged post-independence policy on education. Probably, serious researchers in future would study the difference in the Indian approach to policy formulation; university, secondary, then elementary and contrast it to, say, that of Japan!

After WWII. Its reconstructing process must have been extremely tough and taxing. They thought of going to primary school teachers and teacher preparation schools! The thinking behind this approach was to create a work culture committed to the national cause right at the primary school level and let teachers, parents, learners be encouraged to work for the reconstruction of the nation through an exemplary work culture. They achieved it, no doctor reaches the hospital late, no train arrives late at the platform, and the absentee of proxy teachers must be an unimaginable entity!

Dynamic policy formulation

In the initial years after independence, it was customary in practically every meeting, discussion, or deliberation concerning education, and the education system, to refer to Thomas Babington Macaulay, who wrote his well-known, famous/infamous minutes of 1835. These effectively established his premise that it was necessary to delink Indians from India if Englishmen were to continue to subjugate India without much worry. It was for the new rulers of independent India to get rid of Macaulay and his ghost at the earliest, which unfortunately, India could not do in initial years. There was no justification, after independence, to continue to attribute every drawback, deficiency, and lacunae to Macaulay! The tragedy was that a system designed for only a few, and with totally contrasting objectives of perpetuating and sustaining the British empire was overnight extended to all in independent India!

By the time the Kothari Commission was appointed, the credibility of the government schools had already begun a serious downslide. That continues rather unabated, and has become a great challenge, particularly of almost comparable numerical rise of private schools. This certainly could not be attributed to Macaulay! His 'presence' however, just cannot be ignored. Even today, India and Indians have not fully come out of the web woven by Macaulay to ensure that every English-educated Indian was overwhelmed by the superiority of all that was western. Not only this, he was simultaneously convinced that all that was in India, Indian in culture, tradition, scriptures, and rituals like respect for nature, trees, plants, and animals included, was bunkum and that was the real cause of India's poverty, deprivation, and subjugation!

It took me a couple of years after transitioning from research in physics to the position of a full professor of education to understand Macaulay, and what Macaulay did for his people, the white race and the western culture. He succeeded beyond expectations in making singular contributions in cementing the roots of British colonialism in India. From criticising him in chorus with others, I gradually broke the ranks, and became a true admirer of Macaulay! He did his best for his government, his country! He was not a devotee of Mahatma Gandhi, nor was he bright up in the tradition of *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina*. His culture was different. It was a matter of East and West (Sanskrit Proverb, n.d.): '*Dhanad Dharmam tataha Sukham* ',

**विद्या ददाति विनयं विनयाद्याति पात्रताम्।
पात्रत्वाद्धनमाप्नोति धनाद्धर्मं ततः सुखम्॥**

Education imparts intellectual culture; Intellectual culture secures capacity and stability; Capacity and stability enable to secure wealth; Wealth so secured enables to conform to Dharma Which in turn secures happiness.

is our educational philosophy, not theirs. This philosophy finds a place practically throughout the NEP-2020.

The strength of India right from its ancient days has been its adherence to the eternal unit of humanity, acceptance of various faiths, extending equal respect to each one, while precisely sticking to one's own. The world of today is still in turmoil in spite of mammoth efforts made after having suffered two world wars! There are economic and other strategic considerations also responsible for the absence of sincere efforts on the peace front. The NEP-2020 suggests the way out in clear terms that ought to be globally acceptable: (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2020):

Value-based education will include the development of humanistic, ethical, Constitutional, and universal human values of truth (*satya*), righteous conduct (*dharma*), peace (*shanti*), love (*prem*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*) scientific temper, citizenship values, and also life-skills; lessons in seva/service and participation in community service programmes will be considered an integral part of a holistic education...

Past education policies

As already indicated, the first total and fulsome policy formulation after independence was based upon the recommendations contained in the report of the National Commission on Education (1964-66), popularly known as the Kothari Commission. On the basis of its recommendation, the 1968 National Policy on Education—NPE-1968—was formulated. It emphasised the emerging importance of science and mathematics education, education of girls, and vocationalization of education. It was for the first time that the popular myth of girls not being brainy enough to study science and mathematics beyond class 5 was broken, a new structure of 10+2+3 was proposed, and teaching of science and mathematics was made compulsory up to class 10, both for boys and girls. Millions of girls would not have gotten a chance to enter and excel in science, technology, mathematics, space science, IT, and other technical areas without the foresight of Professor D. S. Kothari. The next policy formulation took place in 1986, which was revisited in 1992, and the policy is known as NPE-86/92. It emphasised the need to introduce new technologies and computers and get ready for the internet and other related applications of emerging technical innovations. It highlighted the role of teacher education institutions and accepted the need for regulating the preparation of teachers.

It is well known that the 20th century saw major advancements in science and technology. Atomic and nuclear sciences were intensively and successfully explored and examined; space technology advanced exploration; man landed on the moon for the first time; and it also saw the end of colonialism and imperialism. Education, though limited in spread and access, had awakened people to their natural rights of equality and liberty, which were essential to moving toward global fraternity. Educational initiatives were certainly delayed at the policy formulation stage as we began the third policy formulation only in 2015-16, and completed it in 2020, after about three decades of the last policy formulation.

Education policies in the future have to remain far more active, alert, and dynamic and may have to be changed, reformulated, or even altered within a couple of years. The concept of *frontline curriculum* says it all. The NEP 2020 acknowledges this. As we move towards the

vision of this policy, it would be worthwhile to recall that UNESCO had appointed an independent commission under the chairmanship of Jacques Delors, which submitted its report in October 1996. This commission tried to envision the global shape of education in the 21st century. During the release function of this report in Geneva the same year, this author was present and recalls the statement made by the chairperson (Delors, 1996): *Education in every country must be rooted in culture and committed to progress, i.e., new knowledge*. The second important point that was noted there was the title of this report: *Learning the treasure within*. It reminds one of Swami Vivekananda's famous words (Vivekananda, 1962): *Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man!*

The unlimited human capability and urge to know more was bestowed upon us by our ancestors—the ancient seers, explorers, astronomers, as well as scientists, and people well versed in their expertise successfully unearthed the mysteries in the spheres of both science and spiritualism. As Dr. Paul Brunton, who has written with profound insight on the achievements of Indian yogis such as Ramana Maharshi, has written:

What science has discovered with the help of cunning instruments, ancient sages discovered many thousands of years ago with the help of concentrated thought alone... This does not mean that scientific research does not need modern instruments and modern infrastructure. We need all that modern science has produced so far. But over and above that, we need a holistic worldview that encompasses science, ethics, and spiritual philosophy. (Brunton, 1952)

Could any policy formulation, in any sector of human activity and endeavour, neglect this compression of global human progress, growth, and development?

Policy implementation 1986/92-2020

The 1986 policy was formulated in an environment full of immense possibilities because of the sudden and welcome arrival of computers in individual hands and the impending IT revolution. Distance education, open schooling, and open universities were coming up globally, and India was not lagging behind. Obviously, preparation was being made to accept new changes in pedagogy and take them to classrooms. This intensified focus on in-service education for serving teachers and effecting necessary changes in pre-service teacher education programs.

To enhance the quality of teacher preparation, the National Council for Teacher Education - NCTE- was established by an Act of parliament in 1993. Major curriculum changes in teacher education were made by the NCTE in the year 1998. (National Council for Teacher Education, 1998) Similarly, the curriculum of school education also underwent major changes; a new curriculum was released on November 12, 2000 by the NCERT. The Parliament was under tremendous pressure to make universalising elementary education a fundamental right instead of retaining it under the Directive Principles of the Constitution. Accordingly, a bill on the right to education was introduced in parliament in 2001; it was subsequently modified in 2009 and, as an act, implemented on April 1, 2010 onwards.

Against this background and the fast pace of change all around in every sector, the process of formulating a new education policy was initiated in 2015/16. A five-member committee was constituted under the chairmanship of a very senior bureaucrat, TSR Subramaniam, former cabinet secretary, with three other retired civil servants. Its report, submitted in 2016, did not see the light of day, and a fresh, larger committee with greater academic representation was constituted under the chairmanship of eminent scientist K. Kasturirangan. It was finalized after

unprecedented levels of consultations, and an equal volume of inputs on the draft, before being announced and accepted by the nation in 2020. In the past also, similar instances have happened. It may also be recalled that another committee, the Ramamurthy committee on education policy was constituted in the times of VP Singh in 1990 as prime minister; the report was submitted but was lost in the rigmarole of as political changes took place rather swiftly.

The Ramamurthy Report was a great effort to coalesce the Gandhian thought, ancient Indian tradition, importance of new knowledge and national aspirations. Another major instance was the ‘demolition’ of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education of 2000, prepared by the NCERT, which was swiftly demolished within a year as the union government changed in May 2004. The Supreme Court of India had, in consultation with state governments, approved the inclusion of environmental education in its syllabus as an independent subject, prepared by the NCERT (NCERT, 2004). The Supreme court ordered on July 13, 2004 that it be implemented with immediate effect. Somehow, it did not see the light of the day. This was a great opportunity that India missed at the beginning of the third millennium.

The vision of NEP-2020

In the light of the background discussed so far, the NEP-2020 finalized its vision as:

The National Education Policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one’s country, and a conscious awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the policy is to instil among the learner a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen. (NEP, 2020, p. 6)

To make things clearer to the serious and interested reader, the NEP-2020 lays down the following *fundamental principles*:

Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student,
According the highest priority to achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
Flexibility,
No hard separations
Multidisciplinary and a holistic education
Emphasis on conceptual understanding
Creativity and critical thinking
Ethics and human & constitutional values
Promoting multilingualism and the power of language
Life skills
Focus on regular formative assessment for learning
Extensive use of technology
Respect for diversity and respect for the local context
Full equity and inclusion
Synergy in curriculum across all levels of education
Teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process
A ‘light but tight’ regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency, autonomy, good governance, and empowerment;
Outstanding research

Continuous review (National Education Policy 2020, p. 5)

The basics of the NEP-2020

There are several aspects concerning the education and growing up of every child that are well known and find a place in policies, plans, and programs but get neglected in the actual implementation of the policies. It is necessary to include all those aspects prominently, which will constitute the basis for a dynamic educational policy that may prepare the young individuals for the next five to six decades, which shall be defined not only by change but also by the *'pace of change.'* Realising that *over 80% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in the early years in order to ensure healthy brain development and growth*, a very bold decision has been taken to change the very structure of the education system, from 10+2+3 to 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18. The 86th amendment of 2009 on the Right to Education was seriously criticised for changing the essence of Article 45, which has used the term 'till they attain 14 years of age' to only 6-14 years, giving the impression that the state has washed its hands of the first five years of learning, which is technically and pedagogically considered essential for the proper psychological, social, cultural, and mental growth of the total personality of the individual child. There are regular reports that children of class 5 could not read the books of class 3, and similar other instances of mathematics are often cited, reflecting serious deficiencies in educational planning and implementation. The present policy gives *'highest priority to achieving fundamental literacy and numeracy by all students by grade 3.'* It emphasises flexibility.

The NEP 2020 takes cognizance of this global approach, and the vision of Indian education is presented in the policy document in the same light. (NEP, 2020)

Indeed, with the quickly changing employment landscape and global ecosystem, it is becoming increasingly critical that children not only learn, but more importantly learn how to learn. Education thus, must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields. Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable. (Introduction, NEP 2020, p. 3)

The entire approach to curriculum development would have to be changed. Instead of rather total dependence on textbooks, systems must move towards textual materials, and must take note of different sources of information and knowledge. (NEP, 2020)

The curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners; and make education more well-rounded, useful, and fulfilling to the learner. Education must build character, enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring, while at the same time prepare them for gainful, fulfilling employment.

See, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

These are the days of the lingering impact of globalization. Practically in every nation, the key areas of national policies and pursuits revolve around 'growth, progress, and development'. Alert nations are keen to develop their own indigenous production systems. In India, 'Make in India' has greatly inspired people, particularly the young persons. It is being increasingly realized how significant it is to enhance 'self-dependence' and encourage indigenous production and distribution systems. It's crucial to balance import-export on one hand, and

upgrade education systems to focus on skill development, learning to learn, entrepreneurship and innovations on the other. The NEP- 2020 needs scrutiny on this scale.

One is personally convinced that if examined academically and professionally, it gets full marks on this front. The generations ahead have already begun to face the serious concerns, including the very survival of the planet earth! The problems of climate change; also put in alternative terms like melting of glaciers, ozone layer, drying of rivers, rise of temperature, polluted cities, rising violence, wars, fundamentalism, terrorism, issues of migration, and growth of mixed demographic regions, cultural and religious differences, and much more! From MDGs, the world has moved to SDGs. The NEP-2020 takes note of these developments (NEP, 2020):

This National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and aims to address the many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including its regulation and governance, to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems. The National Education Policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities - both the 'foundational capacities' of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving - but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. (Introduction, NEP, 2020, p. 3-4)

As the world marches towards the knowledge society, it is necessary for every Indian to understand (NEP, 2020):

The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnana), wisdom (Pragya), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for the complete realization and liberation of the self. World-class institutions of ancient India such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, set the highest standards of multidisciplinary teaching and research and hosted scholars and students from across backgrounds and countries. (Introduction, NEP 2020, p. 4)

On the system, the NEP -2020 summarises: (NEP, 2020)

The Indian education system produced great scholars such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, ..., among numerous others, who made seminal contributions to world knowledge in diverse fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science These rich legacies to world heritage must not only be nurtured and preserved for posterity but also researched, enhanced, and put to new uses through our education system. (Introduction, NEP, 2020, p. 4)

Rich legacies and inheritance bring far greater responsibilities for present and future generations. It is fine that you were great. You suffered because of historic factors beyond your control. But now you must excel in your present, and that alone would convince the global community of your past greatness.

Pillars of implementation

The crux of the policy at the implementation stage lies in what has been articulated about teachers (NEP, 2020):

The teacher must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in the education system. The new education policy must help re-establish teachers, at all levels, as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens. It must do everything to empower teachers and help them to do their job as effectively as possible. The new education policy must help recruit the very best and brightest to enter the teaching profession at all levels, by ensuring livelihood, respect, dignity, and autonomy, while also instilling in the system basic methods of quality control and accountability. (Introduction, NEP 2020, p. 4)

Two aspects deserve serious consideration at every level, the aspirations of the youth, and the readiness, competence, commitment, and performance levels of teachers. Not only this, the work culture in practice in Teacher Education Institutions decides the work culture in every other sector of human activity and initiatives. The prime concern of the youth is their future profession, job, and aspiration to lead a good life, a creative life, and a supportive life. The policy is very clear on:

The new education policy must provide to all students, irrespective of their place of residence, a quality education system, with particular focus on historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups. Education is a great leveller and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality. Initiatives must be in place to ensure that all students from such groups, despite inherent obstacles, are provided various targeted opportunities to enter and excel in the educational system. (Introduction, NEP 2020, p. 4)

According to the Justice J. S. Verma Commission (2012), constituted by the Supreme Court, a majority of stand-alone TEIs—over 10,000 in number—are not even attempting serious teacher education but are essentially selling degrees for a price. Regulatory efforts so far have neither been able to curb the malpractices in the system, nor enforce basic standards for quality, and in fact, have had the negative effect of curbing the growth of excellence and innovation in the sector. The sector and its regulatory system are, therefore, in urgent need of revitalization through radical action, in order to raise standards and restore integrity, credibility, efficacy, and high quality to the teacher education system. (15.2, NEP 2020, p. 42)

In order to improve and reach the levels of integrity and credibility required to restore the prestige of the teaching profession, the Regulatory System shall be empowered to take stringent action against substandard and dysfunctional teacher education institutions (TEIs) that do not meet basic educational criteria, after giving one year for remedy of the breaches. By 2030, only educationally sound, multidisciplinary, and integrated teacher education programmes shall be force. (15.3, NEP 2020, p. 42)

Before one goes deep into the relationship between the teacher, taught, and the system, it would be relevant to deal with certain troubling aspects in detail. The most important is the relationship between teacher and the taught. On this reference, a few researches could be made with which the author was associated.

It emerged from several studies that pupils like teachers with the following attributes:

Praise pupils' ideas

Give less direction, command or orders

Are more indirect in their classroom behaviour

Do less negative talk

Ask more questions while guiding the content-oriented transaction

Possess requisite skills to respond to pupils' ideas, talk and queries

Integrate pupils' ideas in to classroom discussions; and

Are involved in more creative models of teaching (Rajput, 2002, p. 45)

In India, teachers' priorities certainly cannot be the same throughout the country while their mission, of course, remains the same. Social cohesion and learning to live together are universally accepted as the most outstanding of the objectives of education in the present

century. Teachers in rural areas have many additional tasks that may not be the priority for a well-funded school in a metropolis. It is always possible to delineate the quality attributes that would be put to proper application in differing measures depending on the contextual factors:

Love and affection

Openness to criticism

Truthfulness

Sensitivity to students' emotional needs

Perseverance

Humility and modesty

Self-image

Tolerance for mistakes and mischief's

Sense of social justice and equity (Rajput, 2002, p. 45)

The centrality of the role of teacher requires all of them to continuously ponder over their personality traits and the refinements that they have achieved to ensure more comprehensive contribution to the process of growing up. This growing up is not only important for the learner but is equally, if not more, relevant to the teacher. It has been emphasised from time immemorial that only one who continues to learn throughout life is, in fact, eligible to be the teacher. In the contemporary context, it is being highlighted as 'lifelong learning' for both the learner and the teacher.

The language learning

India is blest with several great ancient and classical languages, which have a great treasure of literature that could be of immense help and supports to the young person's not only now but also in future. The implementation of NEP-2020 has generated a nationwide discussion on language teaching, particularly in the context of the three-language formula. This debate must not escape the serious attention of academics, educationists, scholars and serious public opinion makers, as it has grave implications not only for the growth and development of the present generation but also for India's march towards the knowledge society knowledge economy.

One could go deep into various aspects of impediments in the implementation of the NEP-2020 which could reduce the expected levels of achievements on various fronts. To me the toughest challenge is teacher preparation, upgrading teacher education institutions, and providing forward-looking academic leadership, as these are the key areas for transformation. However, let us take the issue of language learning that is attracting national attention.

The language controversy, which has recently been regenerated with Tamil Nadu being its epicentre, deserves serious scrutiny of how politics could impede even the best of the intentions and initiatives that could transform the positive support systems to practically every effort being made to augment the progress, growth, and development of the country. Initially, it was a couple of states which refused to accept the NEP-2020, which was finalised after concentrated efforts of over five years and inputs received from a couple of intended beneficiaries and the people who are concerned about the future of their wards. Never before had such a large-scale face-to-face, written inputs, and media inputs been available to committees that formulated the earlier National Educational Policies in 1968, 1986, and 1992.

It must be stated that over the years, India has developed a very strong, comprehensive, and dynamic system of policy formulation in education. The current policy, obviously, takes into account the experience that the nation has gained over seven decades of implementation of

educational initiatives. India has internationally reputed institutions and organisations that conduct research in policy formulations and implementations. In the case of education, one could mention the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, (NIEPA), and State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) that exist in practically every state. The university department of education conducts research in various aspects of education, its qualities, spread, and extension, and as well as in how far it has contributed to the expectations of the Constitution of India.

Having personally participated in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation over an extended period of around 5 decades, one could put on record that in all consultations related to policy formulation, every state agency, academic, and expert from every state and institution is invited for their input. It is noted that inputs that invite maximum attention and respect come from the states that are presently opposing the NEP-2020, and some have joined the bandwagon against what they call the imposition of Hindi through the three-language formula.

The Kothari Commission had this to say about the regional languages (National Policy on Education, 1986):

- (a) Regional Languages: The energetic development of Indian Languages and literature is a sine qua non for educational and cultural development. Unless this is done, the creative energies of the people will not be released, standards of education will not improve, knowledge will not spread to the people, and the gulf between the intelligentsia and the masses will remain if not widen further. The regional languages are already in use as media of education at the primary and secondary stages. Urgent steps should now be taken to adopt them as media of education at the university stage. (National Policy on Education, 1986, p. 150-51)

This recall is essential in view of the controversy generated about the three-language formula, which was formally put on record in the National Policy on Education of 1968, based upon the report of the Kothari Commission (1964-66). It would be worthwhile to reproduce it in full below (National Policy on Education, 1986, p. 150-51):

- (b) Three-Language Formula: At the secondary stage, the State Governments should adopt, and vigorously implement, the three-language formula which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the non-Hindi-speaking States. Suitable courses in Hindi and /or English should also be available in universities and colleges with a view to improve the proficiency of students in these languages up to the prescribed university standards.

It would be seen that priority has been given to the development of the regional languages and this was the national desire at that stage as people from practically every part of the country interacted with each other in the context of the national freedom struggle. This led to a better understanding and appreciation of the cultural niceties and there was a general tendency to find out how these were related to each other. The emphasis on Hindi was obvious as at that stage the thinking amongst most of those taking active part in the freedom struggle was of national development and growth, eradication of inequalities of social, economic and cultural kinds. They were not worried about the votes or winning elections. The three-language formula has taken such roots where the National Policy on Education of 1968 and 1992 were formulated, no need was found for making any change in it (National Policy on Education, 1986):

The Educational Policy of 1968 had examined the question of the development of languages in great detail; its essential provisions can hardly be improved upon and are as relevant today as before. The implementation of this part of the 1968 Policy has, however, been uneven. The policy will be implemented more energetically and purposefully.

While it was almost agreed upon by most of the national leaders during the freedom struggle that after the independence was achieved, India would need a national language, and this could only be Hindi, as it was spoken by the majority and widely understood even in states that were not Hindi-speaking. In the constituent assembly, this idea was sustained with the rider that until Hindi becomes the national language, English would continue as the league language. The term national language was not given to Hindi. In deference to the wishes of the non-Hindi-speaking states, the term national language was used for Hindi. It also became a *Raj-Bhasha*, like all other regional languages. This respect for the multi linguistic India has been most prominently articulated in the NEP-2020, in fact, it was never before it was so emphatically mentioned as in this policy document (National Educational Policy, 2020):

The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions, aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union, and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity. However, there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State. The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India. In particular, students who wish to change one or more of the three languages they are studying may do so in Grade 6 or 7, as long as they are able to demonstrate basic proficiency in three languages (including one language of India at the literature level) by the end of secondary school. (4.13. NEP 202, p.14)

Successful implementation requires cohesive national action

The successful implementation of the new education policy, NEP-2020 depends on its total acceptance at every level. Most important amongst them are the state governments followed by those implementing it at the grassroots. The level of excellence and quality in higher education organically depends on the quality and excellence achieved at the primary school level and sustained up to the senior secondary level. This is the simplest equation, obvious to all those working in the arena.

In education one could safely attribute the attainment of excellence and innovations to the teachers. It is the total commitment of the individual teacher, right from the primary school to the highest levels, that alone would make a positive difference in an objective and purposeful implementation of the policy. Take Japan for example, it prioritized education at the primary level as at that stage maximum development—emotional, intellectual—takes place supported by a dedicated and committed work culture. In contrast to this, a reluctant, unconcerned, lethargic approach to the change in an educational institution could indeed be injurious to all concerned.

Unfortunately, we in India suffer from such an approach on a pretty wider scale. This is supported by several other factors. Some of the State governments are opposing the NEP-2020, they have declared their intention to have their own policy on education. Technically they may do so, but will it serve the larger cause of the nation, its progress and development! Will it help the young, sensitive learners with loads of dreams before them? The NEP-2020 is an outcome of an unprecedented consultation in which everyone had a chance to participate. The march of

the nation towards excellence must not get hampered because of short-term considerations that are not linked to the welfare of the future of the generations ahead, and the nation.

This author is convinced of:

The need is to move ahead as a single integrated and cohesive national unit is the only alternative in the fast-changing world of education, which is moving much beyond the mere knowledge society or even a wisdom society! In fact, it is not easy even to predict what would be the shape of the academic scenario in the next ten years! On one side, the ICT is pouring in new potentialities that could transform the learning opportunities, and alternatives, and greatly impact the nature of the age-old teacher-taught relationship! On the other, there are new concerns developing because of human migrations, and consequent demographic, cultural and social changes. It is obvious that it would necessarily impact education, culture, and mother-tongue related sensitivities issues, apart from those of religions and faiths. The single-modal situations are getting converted in to multi-modal in several nations, and that requires fresh strategy of handling it, and these are not easy propositions, as is being made evident from reports emerging from several countries, which had the earlier experience only of a single language, monolithic culture and one religion! India is lucky in this respect, but it is creating its own issues that could seriously impede even the much-needed implementation of a dynamic education policy.

It is beautifully expressed by Robert Carneiro:

Indeed, we are witnessing the emergence of a new breed of culture: That developed by Homo connectus or collegatus – a culture of on-line net-working made possible by the immediacy of modern information and communication technologies. It is important to note that the initial stages of connectivity are directly linked to the needs of Homo economicus, increasing his mastery of the world. (Robert L. Carneiro, 2002)

Let it also be realized that new knowledge being discovered and created is mostly for development, growth and progress. Mostly, it focuses on bringing the best out of the mind only, completely ignoring the 'Heart', out of the synergy of the trio that Gandhi had proposed much earlier: bring the best out of 'Head, Hand and Heart'! India, just cannot ignore the other two, because of its specific needs. So, its responsibilities are far greater than certain other advanced-countries, that may suffer young man-power shortage. Actual priorities could be readjusted depending on the emerging scenario. Majority of the young persons in India aspire to get a job after completing their education. They are neither adequately trained in skills nor transformed in attitude to consider the power of ideas and imagination they are blessed with, along with the skills of creativity and inherent human curiosity!

Another factor that deserves serious deliberation was pointed out by Albert Einstein around a century ago: *The most important human endeavour is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depends on it.* This must become the prime objective of NEP: 2020, in its implementation. Too much of technology and AI could create more obstructions in this sphere in near future.

In other words, almost the entire process of knowledge development is for a 'cognocratic society' that is already in a pretty well-established state, and occupying increasingly larger space for itself. Policymakers on education shall have no free time, they have to be consistently alert, active and ready to make necessary changes not only in policies but also the corresponding plans and programmes. Needless to reiterate, the social, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious factors shall always make their presence felt, but sadly enough, handling these would gradually become more and more complex, if sensible and sensitive actions are not properly initiated well in time and with sincere and ethical considerations. The implementation of the NEP-2020 shall have to remain alert to such developing situations.

Academic autonomy is ultimately the responsibility of universities, colleges, and other institutions to decide how they will implement the policy, and harmonize with the indications given to them by central and state agencies. The professional credibility of every institution is determined by the academic stature and professional contributions of its academic faculty. It is essential for faculty members to remember that no profession diminishes in public esteem and credibility due to external factors—it is always internal factors that matter, and the most significant is the moral and ethical component. The quality of the academic contributions, the new knowledge generated, and the new applications suggested make a very positive difference in restoring it! Maintaining high professional standards requires a serious commitment to both the profession, values and the learners. Together, such commitments lead to excellence and individual growth.

Education policies have to be dynamic, and more dynamic than the past. In the future, changes will definitely occur more frequently than in the past. The most significant consequence of this will be the increasing acceptance of professional responsibility by the academics. Regardless of the level at which they impart knowledge, create knowledge, and acquire new knowledge, it is their own personal as well as institutional confidence that ‘we are the creators of future generations and builders of new India’ that would make all the difference. Aim at perfection, excellence will certainly follow and become visible.

References

- Brunton, P. (1952). *The Wisdom of the Over self*. Rider and Company.
- Brunton, P. (1952). *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*. E. P. Dutton & Company (New York)
- Basu, D. D. (1966). *Introduction to the Constitution of India*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA1838410X>. Retrieved February 10, 2025.
- Delors, J. (1996). *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century). UNESCO Publishing.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1945). *The mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (R. K. Prabhu & U. R. Rao, Eds.). Navjivan Publishing House.
- Gandhi, M., & Khipple, R. L. (1947b). *Famous letters of Mahatma Gandhi*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA78331553>. Retrieved January 04, 2025.
- Government of India. (1986). *National policy on education 1986*. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/npe.pdf. Retrieved October 10, 2024.
- Jois, J. M. R. (1997). Human rights and Indian values. In *National Council for Teacher Education eBooks*. p. 8 <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA46327953>. October 22, 2024.
- Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf. Retrieved January 20, 2025.
- Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020* (p. 6). Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf. Retrieved December 20, 2024.

- The Constitution (Eighty-Eighth Amendment) Act, 2003* | *National Portal of India*. <https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-eighty-eighth-amendment-act-2003>. Retrieved December 24, 2024.
- NCTE, *National Council for Teacher Education*, (1998). Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education.
- NCERT, 2004, *Environmental Education in School*, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.
- National Policy on Education-1986, pp. 3.
- National Policy on Education-1986 (with modifications undertaken in 1992), pp. 37
- National Educational Policy -2020, pp. 14.
- Rajput J.S. and Walia; K. (2002). *Teacher Education in India*; pp 132-133; Starling Publishers Private Limited; New Delhi.
- Rajput J.S. (2025). A call for commitment in education, *The Pioneer*, Vol. 35 Issue 96, April, 08 2025, New Delhi
- Roberto Carneiro (2002). *Learning Throughout Life; Challenges for the twenty-first century*, UNESCO Publication, p. 63.
- Vivekananda, S. (1962). *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Vol. 4). Advaita Ashrama.