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ADDRESSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION-THE ROLE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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Abstract:

India has a long and varied history of implementing educational policies at the local, state, and national levels. The nation's educational system has undergone several modifications and improvements throughout the years with the goal of ensuring that all of its residents have access to high-quality education. In this regard, The National Education Policy 2020 in India suggests that by the year 2030, every child aged 3-6 in the country should have access to high-quality early care and education. This study examines the socio-economic disparities in education access using the 75th wave of National Statistical Office data (2021-22). Additionally, we look at the particular contributions that households' socio-economic standing and level of education make to the explanation of these disparities. We find significant regional (rural/urban) and socio-economic disparities in education access in India, with girls and children from historically oppressed social groups (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) being less likely to attend early childhood education, especially in rural areas. We find that adjustments for home economic situation and household head's educational level can substantially reduce the rural-urban gap in access to pre-primary education. Inequalities in gender and socio-economic status are also seen in the household investment in early education. These findings emphasise the need for legislative initiatives and pledges to be made in order to lower obstacles to pre-primary school access for children living in underprivileged circumstances in India.

Keywords: NEP-2020, 5+3+3+4 curricular, Inclusive Growth, Socio-Economic Disparities.

Introduction

Education contribute to the nation's economy and actively participates in civic life, it stimulates critical thinking, develops skills and knowledge, and increases one's sense of social responsibility. The National Education Policy is a comprehensive set of guidelines and recommendations for the Indian education system. It aims to make education more inclusive, relevant, and engaging for all students, and to foster the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By implementing these recommendations, the NEP aims to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive a high-quality education and reach their full potential of human. A human right and a force for long-term growth is education. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda effectively sums up educational goals when it states that by 2030, "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." While the 2030 Agenda is a pledge made by all countries, the government is primarily responsible for ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education. To address educational difficulties and develop inclusive, egalitarian, and relevant systems for all learners, global and regional collaboration as well as the participation of all governments, civil society, the corporate sector, and other international organisations are necessary. India accepted Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by the year 2030. In order to accomplish this aim and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the whole educational system will need to be redesigned to facilitate learning.

A Historical Review of Indian Educational Policies

The history of National Education Policies (NEPs) in India may be found in the British era, when elites only had access to education, which was viewed as a weapon for colonial control¹. The first NEP was created in 1968, following India's independence, with the goal of advancing social justice and economic development via education². However, due to a lack of political will and funding, this policy's execution was only partially successful.

In 1986, the government created a new NEP with the goals of increasing educational access, enhancing educational quality, and fostering vocational education³. Although this programme played a significant role in raising primary enrolment rates, it was unable to solve the problems with access and quality in higher education. The NEP 2020, a thorough reformulation of India's education policy with a goal to restructure the educational system to suit the demands of the 21st century, was announced after a 34-year hiatus⁴. The goal of the policy is to promote critical thinking and transdisciplinary learning while providing all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, with an equal, accessible, and high-quality education.

India and SDG Goal 4

With improvements in both the enrolment and completion of females in both primary and primary school, India had made considerable success in the field of basic education. The objectives of high-quality education and lifelong learning for all are shared by the new national education policy and Sustainable Development Goal 4. In addition to the government programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan aims to provide all Indians with high-quality education, and it is supplemented in this effort by other programmes including teacher training and higher education⁶.

Research Methodology

The data has been collected from the secondary sources of the data such as NEP 2020 report by Ministry of Education, Economic Survey Report (2022-23), Journals, Magazines, News papers etc., useful for the analyzing data for this study.

Main Objectives of New Education Policy-2020

The New Education Policy (NEP), which was introduced in 2020, aims to revamp the Indian educational system. The following are some of the main goals of the NEP:

1. Ensuring universal access to quality education from early childhood to higher education: The NEP strives to provide universal access to quality education from early childhood to higher education with a focus on growing enrollment, lowering dropout rates, and enhancing the quality of education for all students.
2. Supporting interdisciplinary learning: The NEP suggests an interdisciplinary approach to learning that attempts to give students a wide range of skills and competences across disciplines and to foster critical thinking and creativity.
3. Fostering research and innovation: The NEP seeks to promote academic, industrial, and governmental cooperation as well as provide financing and incentives for research and development in order to encourage a culture of research and innovation in education.
4. Improving educational quality: The NEP makes several recommendations to improve educational quality, including the creation of new curricula, the preparation and professional growth of teachers, the use of technology and online resources, and the establishment of accreditation processes for higher education institutions.
5. Fostering equality and inclusion: The NEP intends to foster equity and inclusion in education by addressing inequities based on gender, socioeconomic position, language, and disability as well as by offering assistance and incentives to disadvantaged groups.
6. Strengthening vocational education: The NEP suggests incorporating vocational education and training into regular education in order to give students a variety of skills and competences that are applicable to the labour market.

7. Ensuring global competitiveness

The NEP's overall goal is to change the Indian educational system by supporting a more comprehensive and integrated approach and by coordinating instruction with societal requirements. It aims to promote a culture of lifelong learning and provide students the knowledge and abilities necessary for the twenty-first century⁷.

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

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 called for a significant overhaul of the educational system's curriculum. The former 10+2 structure has been replaced by a 5+3+3+4 scheme. An explanation of the new curricular organisation is provided below:

The foundational stage, which lasts for five years, consists of two years of primary education (for students ages 6–8) and three years of pre-primary education (for children ages 3-6). The foundational stage places a high emphasis on the development of fundamental reading and numeracy abilities while focusing on play-based and activity-based learning.

Stage of Preparation (3 years): The preparatory stage, which comprises three years of upper primary school (for children ages 8 to 11), is the second level of the new curriculum system. The preparation stage is meant to build on the foundational stage and further develop fundamental skills including teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity.

Middle Stage (3 Years): The middle stage, which encompasses three years of secondary school (age 11–14), is the third level of the new curricular system. The middle stage is intended to offer a comprehensive and interdisciplinary education with an emphasis on practical and experience learning.

Secondary Stage (4 years): The secondary level of the new curriculum framework comprises four years of high school education (for students aged 14 to 18). With a focus on building specialised knowledge and abilities for postsecondary education or job paths, the secondary stage is intended to offer a flexible and diverse education.

The 5+3+3+4 curricular framework places more of a focus on core skills, transdisciplinary learning, and vocational education in order to produce a more comprehensive and adaptable educational system.

It also fits in with the worldwide movement towards competency-based education, which emphasises the acquisition of knowledge and skills relevant to the twenty-first century⁸.

Issues with earlier educational policies, including some of those listed below:

- Poor quality of education:
- Inadequate investment in education:
- Limited access to higher education:
- Overemphasis on rote learning
- Gender disparity
- Lack of vocational education
- Language barrier
- Lack of innovation and research

New Education Policy Steps Taken:

- Emphasis on quality education
- Increased investment in education
- Focus on skill development
- Gender equity
- Promotion of research and innovation.
- Flexible curriculum
- Technology integration
- Teacher training
- Decentralization of education
- Integration of culture and values
- Vocational education
- Multilingualism
- Inclusive education
- Assessment and evaluation

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.

The Inclusive Growth in National Educational Policy

The Indian Union Cabinet on July 28th, 2020, adopted the National Education Policy (NEP). This is the third national education policy. In 1968, the first one was announced. The second one was announced in 1986 and changed in 1992. The first education policy of the twenty-first century, the National Education Policy 2020, strives to highlight several expanding developmental trends in our nation. In order to develop a new system that

is in line with the SDG4, this Policy aims to revise all facets of the educational framework, including its regulation and control. The National Education Policy places a strong emphasis on helping each person realise their full creative potential.

The major goal of NEPs is to restructure the educational system and close the achievement gap between intended and present learning results. The goal of the education policy is to achieve equality for all. The SEDG (Socially and Economically Disadvantaged) group has received special attention. Children with disabilities will be able to participate completely in the regular educational system from early childhood through higher education.

The NEP's primary objective is to guarantee that all Indians have access to inexpensive, high-quality education. The policy pledges to reach a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 100 percent at all levels by 2030. Better instructional strategies and teacher preparation are NEP 2020's biggest achievements. The policy encompasses both rural and urban India's primary and secondary education as well as higher education.

The National Educational Policy (NEP), 2020 makes an effort to address the rising inequality and injustice that are now afflicting the nation's educational system. The NEP 2020 acknowledges, among other things, the high dropout rates among socio-economic groups and disadvantaged minorities. The analytical article provides a brief overview of the most important proposals for inclusive education and lists some of the biggest obstacles that the NEP will have to overcome⁹.

Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the glaring underrepresentation of several groups in the current educational institutions. The NEP has combined gender identities, socio-cultural identities, regional identities, impairments, and socioeconomic situations to establish a new social group called SEDGs to specifically meet their educational requirements. The majority of the policy's goals are based on fostering inclusion among these groups. As previously indicated, these groups have higher dropout rates for a variety of reasons, ranging from historical exclusion of communities from educational institutions for the socio-cultural identity classification to lack of accessibility for tribal communities (geographic).

The NEP 2020 recommends a number of policies and programmes that have been proven to increase enrolment and increase representation, including targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to encourage parents to send their children to school, and providing bicycles for transportation.

However, there are several issues with this wide classification. It is problematic since the policy does call for reservations and does acknowledge caste as a historical barrier. Similar to this, the numerous structural barriers that prevent these populations from excelling in educational institutions due to the ongoing prejudice they experience from a variety of sources are not acknowledged.

It's significant that the policy recognise the necessity of affirmative action, which is acknowledged as the absolute minimum to ensure equitable representation. Affirmative action and caste inclusion in teacher hiring are acknowledged.

Recognition of Gendered Identities

The NEP 2020 acknowledges that women and transgender persons are the most adversely affected demographic across all racial and socio-economic groups. Plans call for putting into action programmes that distribute bicycles to form cycling clubs and establish walking groups at schools to encourage community involvement and provide safety nets for these vulnerable youngsters. In addition, the new policy suggests setting up a "Gender-Inclusion Fund" to improve educational opportunities for women and transgender people in recognition of the crucial demands of girls' education.

Recognition of Individuals with Special Needs

The policy supports include special needs students in regular educational settings and acknowledges their existence. It substantially complies with The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016's goals.

In order to ensure that instruction is more inclusive and sensitive to children's needs, the strategy also aspires to hire special educators in all school complexes. Children with severe learning problems will be permitted to choose homeschooling and will be given access to qualified homeschooling teachers so they may continue to study and get the greatest educational resources.

Also, teachers will receive training on how to spot learning difficulties in young children and how to support such kids in succeeding academically and taking care of their emotional health. To develop fair systems of evaluation for kids with learning difficulties, the National evaluation Centre, PARAKH, will be established. To further this goal, many education approaches are suggested.

Creation of Special Educational Zones (SEZs)

The NEP's advice to establish Special Educational Zones (SEZs) in areas with sizable populations of members of Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups and in those areas with high aspirations is one of its most notable recommendations. The main goal is to provide education to the most isolated and distant regions of India. To change these underdeveloped regions, additional funding will be pumped in while various plans and initiatives of the federal government and the states would be coordinated. The policy hasn't specified what the criterion for these zones would be and how will they be distinguished in urban and rural landscapes, despite the fact that this novel idea has the potential to transform educational access in inaccessible areas of the country (such as urban ghettos with substantial minority population)¹⁰.

Conclusion

In order to eliminate regional educational inequities and foster economic progress, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the Indian educational system. For all kids to acquire fundamental information, elementary education is crucial. Articles 21-A and 45 of the Indian Constitution include provisions for early childhood care and education for kids less than six years old. Article 21A, which states that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 have the basic right to an education, was also included by the Constitution Act of 2002. It states that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 must get a free, public education.

According to the article, every child, regardless of socio-economic status, will attend the nearby school. Economic growth is said to need a strong component of education. The importance of education for socio-economic development has been emphasised heavily in both the Indian Constitution and national education policies. Therefore, education is crucial for both the personal and national progress of each individual.

By providing equal access to high-quality educational opportunities for all, it will help achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). To end regional inequality and advance economic growth and inclusive growth in India, all students must have access to equal educational opportunities. The scope of school education may be widened to permit numerous routes to learning incorporating both formal and non-formal education forms in order to enhance learning for all students, with specific attention on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). To meet the students' educational demands, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools' open and distance learning (ODL) programmes may be reinforced and expanded. The NEP 2020 did well by emphasising the difficulties experienced by minorities, children with special needs, and gendered categories. In terms of suggesting a number of admirable actions, such as education SEZs to solve the structural issues with education in inaccessible regions, it has also done well.

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