



Vocational Education In The Context Of Nep 2020: Policy Recommendations And Opportunities

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Abstract: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift in India's education system by giving a strong emphasis on integrating vocational education into mainstream educational institutions in a phased manner. The purpose of this study is to examine the key recommendations of NEP 2020 on vocational education and to explore the opportunities and potential benefits created by NEP 2020 for students and teachers. The paper discusses key recommendations of NEP 2020 on vocational education, including early-stage integration, no rigid boundaries between academic and vocational streams, fostering industry collaboration, establishment of National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), promotion of Lok Vidya etc. The policy highlights the opportunities like skill development, employability, entrepreneurial skills, flexible learning pathways, career awareness for students, while also outlines professional growth, innovative teaching strategies, industry exposure, skill upgradation and continuous learning for teachers. Bridging the gap between education and employment as well as theory and practice, the policy aims to prepare students for the dynamic demands of the 21st-century workforce while fostering holistic development and lifelong learning.

Keywords: Vocational Education, NEP 2020, Skill Development, Flexible Learning Pathways, Industry Exposure.

I. Introduction

Education is an endeavour to empower individuals to be self-sufficient. The United Nations, with its vision for global welfare, framed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to create a pathway for the welfare of the people to eradicate poverty. As a developing country, India's development mainly depends on its citizens and vocational education is one of the helping aids in its growth (Joseph, 2024). Therefore, nowadays vocational education has been identified as an essential prerequisite for the development of a country. A country like India, where the population of young people has been increasing day by day, if everyone is trained to become highly competent individuals, the economy will continue to flourish. However, due to the absence of providing vocational education regarding exposure in majority of schools, pupils are unable to acquire the necessary skills resulting in a persistent skill gap (Laskar, 2023).

Over the past few years, various policies were introduced in the education sector to develop an infrastructure for making vocational education an integral part of all levels of education, but after the post-independence era, mainly Secondary Education Commission (SEC, 1952-53) recommended to establish multi-purpose schools and integrating vocational courses in to secondary mainstream education. After this commission, The Indian Education Commission (IEC, 1964-66) proposed a structured approach (10+2+3) to provide vocational education at different stages. The commission also suggested to provide Work Experience Programme (WEP) in general education up to middle school level and Vocationalization of Education programme (VEP) at the secondary level. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1968) accepted the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964-66) and emphasized the 'effective terminal nature of the vocational stream of studies' (Sethy, 2022). Subsequently, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and Programme of Action (POA, 1992) emphasized on vocationalization of education and suggested to integrate vocational education in both organized and unorganized sectors at all levels of education. The purpose of this policy is to improve students' employability and skills, foster social mobility, cultivate a positive attitude towards work, and instil in them the value of dignity of labour (Jena, 2023).

In this evolving world, vocational education plays a vital role to prepare students for different kinds of work and vocations. Work is an important part of every individual's life, which facilitates individuals to deal with practical aspects of daily life and shaping the destiny of future mankind. Vocational education is a fundamental and powerful instrument in a pupil's life to enable them to explore the different types of work/vocations in order to determine what they want to pursue to live a purposeful and productive life (NCFSE, 2023). However, vocational education does not intend to make the child become a carpenter, artisan, weaver, or businessman, it simply refers to give a self-reliant to the students in the future and develop a child's holistic personality. According to the 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-2017), it was estimated that less than 5% of Indian workforce between the age group of 19 to 24 received formal vocational education rather than other developed countries like USA (52%), Germany (75%), South Korea (96%) (NEP, 2020). These numbers highlight the necessity of vocational education in India. Therefore, this study aims to examine the key policy recommendations of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on vocational education and to explore the opportunities and potential benefits it creates for teachers and students.

II. Objectives of this study

1. To examine the key policy recommendations of NEP 2020 on vocational education.
2. To explore the opportunities and potential benefits created by NEP 2020 under vocational education provision for students, and teachers.

III. Methodology

A qualitative research design is adopted for this present study. The information used in this study collected from secondary sources such as reputable journal papers, policy reports, policy frameworks, books, and the NEP 2020 final draft.

IV. Re-imagining Vocational Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is structured into four major parts and each parts addressing distinct dimensions of the education system. Within Part-II of Higher Education, vocational education is given focused emphasis in chapter-16: Reimagining Vocational Education of the policy document (pp. 43-44). This section comprehensively discusses the historic challenges of vocational education, highlights the necessity developing skilled workforce through its integration into mainstream education and sets a clear target that by 2025 at least 50% of students at school and higher education levels will have exposure to vocational education.

V. Objective Wise Analysis:

Objective 1: To examine the key policy recommendations of NEP 2020 on vocational education.

In an effort to restructure India whole education system the Ministry of Education introduced the NEP 2020, based on the recommendations of committee chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan. After the NPE (1986), which remained in effect for thirty-four years, the NEP 2020 is the first comprehensive education policy of the 21st-century approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020 (Press Information Bureau (PIB, 2020); Saharia & Mazumdar, 2024). The traditional education system of India primarily focused on textbook knowledge (Toppo, 2023). However, with the emerging demand for skilled workforce the NEP 2020 envisions a paradigm shift in the education system by emphasizing on holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning. One of the major reforms proposed in this policy is the integration of vocational education into mainstream education system. In this context to address the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills and meet the rising demands for skilled workforce the policy provides the following key recommendations on vocational education which are as follows:

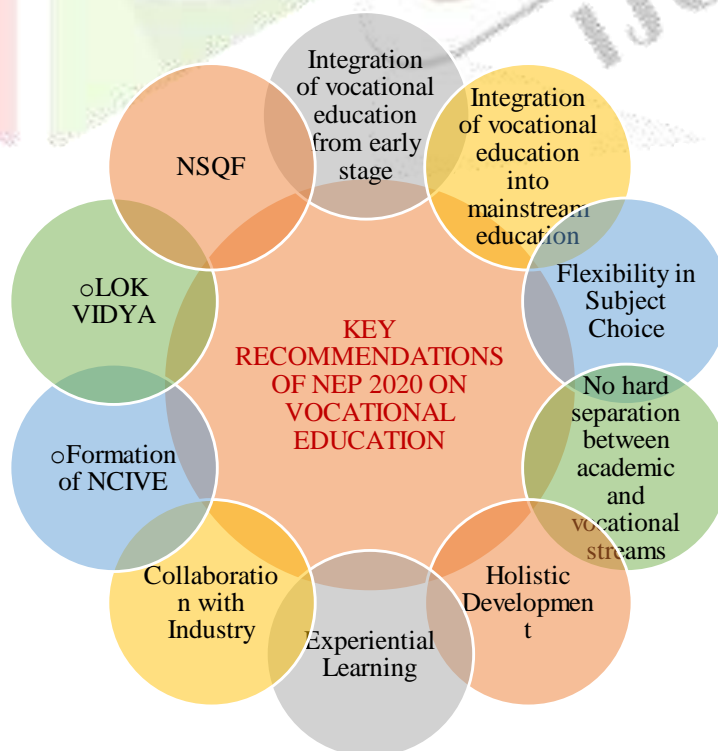


Figure 1 NEP 2020 Key Recommendations on Vocational Education

Integration of Vocational Education from Early Stage

The policy recommended to integrate vocational education from grade 6 by providing hands-on experience in important vocational crafts such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc. as per local needs (Chopra & Banerjee, 2023). The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was advised to design a practice-based curriculum for grade 6-8 while framing the NCFSE 2020-21. A 10-day period was suggested throughout the year to enable students to interact with local vocational experts and participate in enrichment activities like arts, quizzes, sports and vocational crafts. The students will also get periodic exposure through visits to historical, cultural, tourist place, as well as to local artist, craftsmen, and higher education institutions in their village, Tehsil, District, and State. The policy also suggested that similar internship opportunities in vocational subjects will be made available for students from grade 6-12, including holidays. Vocational courses will also be made available through online mode (Chopra & Banerjee, 2023).

Integration of Vocational Education into Mainstream Education

According to 12th five-year plan (2012-2017), only 5% of Indian workforce aged 19-24 received vocational education as compared to other developed countries. In earlier, vocational education was mainly provided to school dropouts from grade 8 onwards and students in grade 11-12. However, after completing grade 11-12 in vocational subjects' students face a lack of well-defined pathways to pursue their chosen vocational courses in higher education. Vocational education perceived as an inferior to mainstream education and meant for students who struggle academically. Therefore, this policy aims to overcome the social stigma associated with vocational education by integrating vocational education into mainstream education in all educational institutions in a phased manner.

Flexibility in Subject Choice

The world is changing rapidly and our education system must adapt to these transformations. Therefore, the goal of this policy is to empower students by providing flexibility in subject choices, specifically at the secondary level. This flexibility allows students to choose from a wide range of subjects, including arts, crafts, physical education, and vocational skills. Such exposure enables students to design their own pathways of study and life plans according to their interest, abilities, and future aspirations.

No hard Separation between Academic and Vocational Streams

Historically, vocational education is always perceived as an inferior form of education as compared to general education (Saharia & Mazumdar, 2024). To remove this perception and prepares future generation holistically the policy advocated integrating vocational education with mainstream education in a phased manner including school, college and higher education. It also recommended no hard separation among curricular, extracurricular, or co-curricular areas or among arts, humanities or science as well as between vocational and academic streams. Such integration enables students to develop their academic understanding and practical competencies.

Holistic Development

The NEP 2020 aims to transform the education system from rote learning to conceptual based learning. The traditional educational context gives large emphasis on cognitive development and curricular aspects. However, with the increasing demands of the 21st century the policy recommends to prepare students holistically by addressing their intellectual, social, emotional and moral aspects. It also outlined to develop a well-rounded individual who possess not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, empathy, life skills which are necessary for personal and societal well-being.

Experiential Learning

In the earlier, traditional education system was given greater emphasis on theory-based learning rather than practical learning. It emphasizes the necessity for experiential learning and hands-on training to provide students with practical exposure and real-life experiences to make their learning meaningful, enjoyable, engaging and skill oriented.

Collaboration with Industry

Vocational education prepares student to become productive future citizen in the world of work by equipping them with hands-on abilities and practical skills. To strengthen the quality of vocational education and bridging the gap between education and employment the policy recommends collaboration with industry and creating opportunities for students to interact with local vocational experts. Such partnership effectively prepares students for the dynamic requirements of the 21st-century workforce.

Formation of NCIVE (National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education)

The NEP 2020 recommends to establish NCIVE to strengthen and overlook the implementation of vocational education in India. This committee envisioned to include academicians, industry professionals, and experts in vocational education (Saharia & Mazumdar, 2024) to monitor the integration of vocational courses across school, college and higher education institutions.

LOK VIDYA

The policy emphasizes the integration of lok vidya into vocational education to promote traditional local knowledge, indigenous skills, crafts and practices. It helps students to learn culturally rooted skills while fostering entrepreneurship and community development.

NSQF (National Skills Qualifications Framework)

The Government of India introduced NSQF in 2013 which was a competency-based education and training framework designed for students to enhance students' vertical mobility towards vocational education. This framework helps students to choose their vocation according to their interest, aptitude, and competency. It also facilitates multiple entry and exits across general and vocational education (Saharia & Mazumdar, 2024).

Objective 2: To explore the opportunities and potential benefits created by NEP 2020 under vocational education provision for students, and teachers.

Reimagining vocational education in India plays a very crucial role in addressing existing challenges and enabling the country to create a skilled workforce aligned with the evolving demands of rapidly changing economy (Yadav & Madhadvendra, 2024). In this context, the NEP 2020 creates multiple opportunities for both students and teachers in the field of vocational education, which aims to make vocational learning more accessible, flexible, practical and aligned with the needs of 21st-century workforce. In the following sections, the opportunities for students and teachers are discussed comprehensively: -



Figure 2 Opportunities Created by NEP 2020 For Students

Skill Development

In the earlier educational context, vocational education (VE) received less emphasis as compared to academic education. However, with the rising demand for skilled labour in the economy the policy recommended to prepare students for different kinds of work which will equip students to learn specific knowledge and practical skills in a vocation of their choice such as electronics and hardware, tourism and hospitality, food processing, tailoring and many more other areas. For example: if a student's learn VE in tourism and hospitality, it equips them to develop essential skills like communication, cultural awareness, leadership and teamwork, management, and problem-solving skills etc. These competencies not only help students to enhance their employability but also provide a clear roadmap for pursuing this field as a future career.

Career Awareness

The policy recommends integrating VE from the early stage of schooling to provide students with exposure to a wide range of work opportunities. It also suggested organizing 10 bagless days for middle school stage as part of VE. During this period students engage in various vocational activities in the form of projects,

gain hands-on-experiences, and interact with vocational experts. While at the secondary stage students are introduced to multi-skill foundation courses in different vocations such as apparel, agriculture, automotive, beauty & wellness, telecom, plumbing, construction, Retail, IT and other related areas. These experiences help students to cultivate variety of skills, broaden their self-awareness, develop vocational interests and enhance career awareness ability to make informed career choices in the future.

Employability

Work is the crucial part of life which prepares students to deal with practical aspects of daily living and enhances their financial well-being (NCFSE, 2023). India being a developing country faces severe unemployment issues and according to 12th five-year plan (2012-2017) less than 5% of Indian workforce in the age group of 19-24 received VE as compared to much higher proportions in other countries. To bridge the gap between education and employment, the policy aims to provide holistic exposure and practical learning experiences across various vocations which will enable students to develop employable skills and get gainful employment in the future.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Nowadays VE has been identified as an essential prerequisite for the development of a country. It fosters entrepreneurial skills among students by integrating prevocational capacities into the mainstream curriculum as well as equips students with the knowledge, experience and practical skills to understand, observe and engage with different occupations around them and create opportunities to select their suitable pathways for starting their own business.

Flexible Learning Pathways

The NEP 2020 emphasizes flexible learning pathways for students where they get opportunities to choose subjects such as physical education, arts, crafts and vocational skills to design their own paths of study and life plans. In VE this flexibility allows students to select various vocations such as apparel, agriculture, automotive, beauty & wellness, telecom, plumbing, construction, retail, IT etc. according to their needs, talents, interests and future aspirations.

Holistic Development

The policy recommends holistic development by integrating vocational education with mainstream education through diverse vocational courses. These courses not only develop self-awareness, self-esteem among students but also foster various soft skills and 21st-century skills including critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, technical, teamwork, leadership, cooperation, life skills etc. This comprehensive approach nurtures students holistically and equips them to navigate real-life problems effectively and efficiently.

Life Long Learning

VE under NEP 2020 encourages lifelong learning by fostering curiosity and adaptability among students. It equips them with basic knowledge and practical skills that can be upgraded over time according to changing industry demands, trends and personal interests. For example: if a students learn basic technical skills through IT courses, over time they can upgrade their knowledge to understand new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Gamification, or Cybersecurity etc., such continuous learning tendency among students enhances their employability and personal growth throughout life.

Teachers are the backbone of our society and plays a vital role in shaping future generations of citizens. The NEP 2020 advocates universal access to quality education and is designed to place the teachers at the center of fundamental reforms in the India education system. In this regard, the policy aims to empower teachers and enable them to teacher perform their job roles effectively (PSS Central institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE), 2023). The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of the opportunities for teachers envisaged under NEP 2020: -

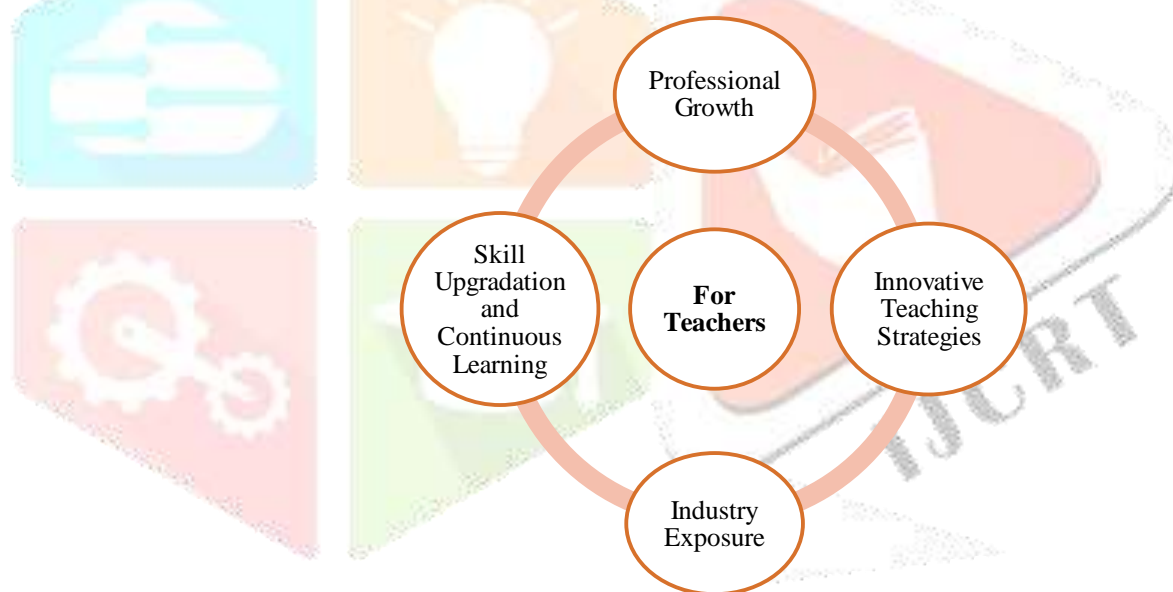


Figure 3 Opportunities Created by NEP 2020 For Teachers

Professional Growth

The policy recommends integrating vocational education with mainstream education at different stages of schooling to ensure the holistic development of students. Therefore, it encourages teachers to expand their pedagogical knowledge and undertake training to effectively integrate vocational and skill-based learning with academic subjects. It also promotes teachers' active participation in continuous professional development programmes. These initiatives enable teachers to enhance their professional competence, self-esteem, and effectiveness in guiding students towards career readiness.

Innovative Teaching Strategies

Teacher plays a very crucial role in shaping the lives of students and ultimately the future of our nation. With the changing needs of society, the policy emphasizes the innovative teaching strategies such as experiential learning, arts-integrated learning, sports-integrated learning, hands-on activities, toy-based pedagogy, storytelling-based pedagogy. These pedagogical approaches help teachers to upgrade their knowledge, align with evolving demands while making learning more engaging and meaningful. It also encourages teachers to go beyond traditional lecture-based methods and bridge the gap between theory and practice, which in turn nurtures students' abilities and enhance teachers' instructional effectiveness.

Industry Exposure

According to 12th Five-year plan (2012-2017), less than 5% of the Indian workforce received formal vocational education as compared to other developing countries like; USA (52%), Germany (75%) and in South Korea (96%). By realizing the necessity demand for a skilled workforce, the policy aims to overcome the social status hierarchy historically associated with VE and emphasizes its integration into mainstream education. Through this initiative, the policy outlined the dignity of labour and the importance of various vocations including Indian arts and craftsmanship. It also promotes partnerships between schools, local industries and vocational institutions allowing teachers to interact with local vocational experts and bring real-world insights into the classrooms. Such exposure develops communication, leadership, management, and social skills among teachers.

Skill Upgradation and Continuous Learning

The policy encourages teachers to continuously upgrade their skills by actively participate in various workshops, internships, capacity-building programmes. These opportunities help teachers to stay updated with evolving pedagogical methods, industry demands, and vocational skills that will enable them to enhance their teaching effectiveness and effectively guide students in developing relevant skills.

VI. Conclusion

Work is important part of our lives. To instill the value of the dignity of labour and to remove social stigma associated with vocational education, NEP 2020 recommends the implementation of vocational education at every stage in a phased manner. This study highlights the key recommendations of NEP 2020 on vocational education such as early integration of vocational education to raise awareness about various vocations, provide basic knowledge and reduce dropout rates; fostering industry collaboration to receive practical and hands-on learning experiences; promoting Lok vidya to develop local crafts, skills and practices; establishing NCIVE to strengthen the vocational education implementation in India; and introducing NSQF to choose flexible learning pathways. This study also comprehensively addresses the opportunities and benefits for students including skill development through hand-on-learning activities; interaction with local vocational experts, bridging the gap between education and employment through life skills, career awareness and entrepreneurial skills as well as flexible learning pathways for students to design

their own study and life span across discipline. It also nurtures students holistically to navigate real life problems effectively and fostering life-long learning tendencies among students to upgrade their knowledge over time. Similarly, for teachers it provides the opportunities to continuously upgrade their skills through workshop, internships, and specialized training programmes. However, the success of these reforms will largely depend on how effectively they are implemented at the ground level. Strengthening teacher training, building industry partnerships, continuous monitoring, and developing region-specific vocational modules as per there needs and demands will be very crucial for achieving the policy goals. Therefore, future research and practice should be focus on assessing the actual impact of NEP 2020 on employability, inclusion, and economic development ensuring that vocational education becomes a true catalyst for a self-reliant, skilled and inclusive India.

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