

NEP 2020 for Undergraduates: Lofty Promises, Flawed Execution, and the Path Forward

By Annika Gwalani

India's first National Educational Policy was formed in 1968 which was later modified in the years 1986 and 1992. After almost three decades, the Indian Education system had the formulation of the National Education Policy 2020. It was introduced as a transformative reform aimed at revolutionizing the Indian education system. Its objectives include making education more holistic, skill-oriented, and globally relevant while fostering inclusion and equity. While the policy's vision is laudable, its implementation, particularly at the undergraduate level, has faced significant criticism. We students have observed first-hand the practical shortcomings of NEP's rollout and its unintended consequences. The three most pressing of these are poor workforce training, lack of funding for critical features, and a missing monitoring mechanism.

The NEP's adoption was rushed, leaving universities and colleges with inadequate time to prepare. Institutions were expected to overhaul curricula, introduce new courses, and train faculty almost overnight. This haste undermined the systematic planning required for such a monumental transition. Professors and administrative staff were unprepared for the NEP's drastic changes. Due to a lack of training and faculty members' unfamiliarity with interdisciplinary and skill-based teaching approaches, the quality of teaching was inconsistent.

Moreover, the NEP's ambitious goals were not supported by sufficient financial or infrastructural resources. The policy advocates for increased public funding in education, aiming for 6% of GDP to be able to successfully bring about reforms that require greater expenditure. While this target is ambitious, India has historically spent around 3% of its GDP on education (Aithal, 2020), far below the target, leading to a shortfall in resources required to execute the NEP's reforms. For instance, the option of choosing from the pool of 22 constitutional languages as part of the Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course (AECC) was provided to promote multilingualism and inclusivity (Shukla, 2020). However, most institutions could only provide resources and faculty for a few of the most commonly studied languages. Due to this shortfall, vulnerable communities that spoke more uncommon languages suffered the most. Trusting the system, they took admission to institutions that

they traditionally did not join due to language barriers, but they ran head first into an invisible wall of the same problem due to the botched rollout (Samar, 2022).

The lack of adequate funding has also amplified another challenge of the Indian education system- the lack of digital infrastructure in underfunded schools serving marginalized communities. The NEP relies heavily on technology to deliver its vision of flexible and personalised education. However, India's stark digital divide excluded many of her students from

experiencing many of the policy's intended benefits. This is particularly evident in Bihar and Odisha where internet access is intermittent and device availability is limited. This hindered the effectiveness of digital interventions and widened existing inequalities, and has made it a policy largely effective only for the wealthy (Saluja, 2023). A reality brought about by the failure of the designing bodies to account for ground realities and evidence.

Finally, the policy lacks a central, standardized framework for tracking progress, evaluating outcomes, and addressing bottlenecks (Mandal, 2023). Without systematic data collection and analysis, it is difficult to measure whether initiatives like vocational training, digital learning, or GER targets are being met. Although a portal was introduced in 2023 for universities to report data to be further used for tracking progress, the mechanisms utilised including quantitative tools and metrics, are not transparent. This opacity undermines confidence in the system and its ability to drive evidence-based adjustments. Successful policy implementation also requires regular feedback to course-correct strategies. However, the NEP provides no mechanism to ensure this at the national, state, or institutional levels.

What Could Have Been Done Differently

The aspirations and goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) could have been brought to life with greater impact through a more nuanced and strategic approach of opting for phased implementation and ensuring wider stakeholder engagement.

A gradual, phased rollout would have allowed institutions to gradually adapt to the new framework. Pilot programs could have been introduced in select universities in high-literacy states such as Kerala or Tamil Nadu to identify challenges and refine strategies before nationwide implementation. This would have minimised the rushed transition and accompanying issues of faculty unpreparedness and infrastructure inadequacies (Kulal et al., 2024).

The NEP could also have been more impactful had it incorporated consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, and education experts, at both the design and implementation stages (Joshi, 2023). While the Ministry of Human Resource Development formed a committee led by Dr K. Kasturirangan and consulted vice-chancellors, cabinet members, and other authorities, critical voices from social scientists and student bodies were largely excluded. These on-ground stakeholders were experiencing the realities of the system and had concerns about the commercialization of education, language policies, and the lack of attention to regional needs and social diversity (Pawan, 2020). Incorporating their evidence would have avoided disparities and led to a policy that truly reflected the ground realities of India's educational landscape, fostering broader acceptance and more successful implementation across all levels of society.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness and equity of the NEP, it is essential to foster transparency through robust evaluation mechanisms, and stakeholder management and critically increase funding to improve digital access.

The government should establish a transparent monitoring system that releases biannual progress reports, using clear and quantifiable metrics to track the implementation of NEP initiatives and their results. This would allow for timely interventions and adjustments, ensuring that the objectives are met effectively. In addition to these short-term evaluations, longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess the long-term impact of the NEP on student outcomes such as academic performance, career prospects and socio-emotional well-being (Kulal et al., 2024).

Additionally, the government could form a committee consisting of social scientists, student representatives, teachers and parents from diverse socio-economic and regional backgrounds (Lakshmi et al., 2023). This committee would continuously gather feedback and incorporate their insights into policy revisions to make the NEP representative and relevant.

Finally, to produce better outcomes going forward, the government should increase expenditure on education to meet the target of 6% of the GDP. This could include investments in digital infrastructure, teacher training, and digital resources to bridge the regional disparities (Viswanathan, 2020). For instance, expanding internet and device access to rural areas by leveraging the PM-WANI (Public Wi-Fi Access Network Interface)

and PMGDISHA (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan) initiatives can improve digital penetration in underserved regions and achieve NEP's vision of equitable digital education.

Conclusion

India's rollout of the New Education Policy of 2020 was hampered by the lack of training provided for those responsible for its implementation, poor funding and a delayed and opaque monitoring system. A hurried rollout prevented better testing and fine-tuning and also excluded some of the most critical stakeholders from the policy design and implementation process.

Implementing a transparent monitoring mechanism that assists improvements, engaging all the impacted stakeholders, from design to last-mile implementation, and providing essential funds will take the policy from a highly lauded but paper tiger policy to a ground-level victory that brings contemporary and valid education to all.

Citations

1. Kulal, A., N., A., Dinesh, S., Bhat, D. C., & Girish, A. (2024). Evaluating the Promise and Pitfalls of India's National Education Policy 2020: Insights from the Perspectives of Students, Teachers, and Experts. *Sage Open*, 14(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241279367>
2. Samar, W. (2022, July 13). With English cut from syllabus, apprehensions arise. *The Patriot*.
<https://thepatriot.in/reports/with-english-cut-from-syllabus-apprehensions-arise-26803>
3. Shukla, A. (2020, July 31). New Education Policy does not shed English language but focuses on multilingualism: HRD Minister. *Hindustan Times*.
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/new-education-policy-does-not-shed-english-language-but-focuses-on-multilingualism-hrd-minister-article1-10125090.html>
4. Joshi, Geeta. (2023). Opportunities and Challenges in Application of NEP 2020: A Meta-Analysis.

5. Vijaya Lakshmi, V., Vanapalli, & Ugandhar, T. (2023). Problems, obstacles, and suggestions for improving the quality of higher education institutions in NEP. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review*, 5, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i03.3203>
6. Aithal, Sreeramana & Aithal, Shubhrajyotsna. (2020). Analysis of the Indian National Education Policy 2020 Towards Achieving its Objectives. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 10.2139/ssrn.3676074.
7. Goswami, S. (2022, July 10). DU leaves out English from credit courses under UGCF, trouble mounts for ad-hoc teachers. News18. <https://www.news18.com/news/education-career/du-leaves-out-english-from-credit-courses-under-ugcf-trouble-mounts-for-ad-hoc-teachers-5526391.html>
8. Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Retrieved from Ministry of Education: <https://www.education.gov.in/nep/about-nep>
9. Pawan, K. (2020). An empirical study on NEP 2020 [National Education Policy] with special reference to the future of the Indian education system and its effects on the stakeholders. *Journal of Management Engineering and Information Technology - JMEIT*, 7(5), 17. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4159546>
10. Viswanathan, K. (2020, August). A reality check on NEP 2020: 6 major challenges in implementation. India Today. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/featurephilia/story/a-reality-check-on-nep-2020-6-major-challenges-in-implementation-1711197-2020-08-14>
11. Mandal, M. A. (2023). A critical analysis of the National Education Policy 2020: Implications and challenges. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4(7), 1971-1978. <https://www.ijrpr.com>
12. Saluja, A. (2023). NEP-2020 and its vision of a digitalized education system: A critique on digital divide and inequality. In *Implementation strategies of NEP 2020 for Indian higher education* (pp. 143–151). Rudra Publishers & Distributors.