

Empowering Rural Development via the Implementation of National Education Policy, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Education has emerged as a tool to address poverty, socio-economic inequalities, and discrimination. Education possesses a more significant capacity than previously recognized to enhance overall quality of life. Limited rural educational initiatives are unlikely to influence substantial and enduring improvements in rural education. Rural education will persist in its inferiority to urban education until a fair educational objective is implemented. The Union Cabinet on 29 July 2020 approved the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with a vision to bring about holistic and integrated education for the students of India. The strategy seeks to reform the entire education system, with a particular emphasis on its effects on rural education, given the distinct obstacles encountered in rural regions. The research presented here looks at how NEP 2020 will affect education in rural areas, stressing both the benefits and the problems it brings.

Keywords: Education, NEP2020, Rural Economy, Skill, Agriculture, Technology.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the prime variables required for rural development. Generally, rural areas in the developing countries are alarming due to poverty, unemployment, low standards of living, malnutrition, health and sanitation, lack of communication and transport, illiteracy, superstitions, indigence, insecurity, injustice, and primitive life. Education makes man a rational thinking being and helps one to bridge the gap between oneself and nature through knowledge. It is this knowledge which has led to the advancement of science and technology and made the life of the people easier, comfortable, and longer (Palanichamy, 2011). In the developed world, education has become a basic right of citizenship and the nations concerned have taken the necessary steps to broaden access to education, improve quality, and ensure equity in education opportunities. A sound strategy for the overall development of rural areas might be developed with the help of the New Education Policy. Grounded in the tenets of fairness, inclusivity, and excellence, NEP 2020 offers significant potential for rural education, which has historically faced structural problems and disadvantages (Reddy et al., 2023).

Global events and trends have already influenced India's higher education. This system offers academic freedom, extensive research opportunities, and innovative advantages derived from liberal autonomy. It would enhance skill development in India by providing students with several entry and exit pathways, as well as the opportunity to pursue further education post-employment (Yadav, 2021). Rural development refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of people living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. It includes the development of rural areas, households, institutions and economies. Rural development is understood in a narrower sense to focus on concentrated efforts for raising the quality of life of the rural poor. It implies the efforts aimed at

providing employment and self-employment to the rural poor. Rural development usually refers to integrated rural development initiatives which emphasize the economic development of the rural poor through an integrated approach to development, including agricultural development, rural infrastructure, marketing and credit. The Rural Areas in India contribute a large part of the nation wealth. They consist of villages and their surrounding uninhabited areas and are usually characterized by an economy that is based on agriculture, animal husbandry, timber and coal mining. The villagers do cottage and small industries in their houses, and people feel detached from the urban life style, and hope to develop their rural economy by implementing the New Education Policy 2020. By providing youth with marketable skills, NEP 2020 aims to reduce economic disparities and promote upward mobility, especially for marginalized communities. India is mostly a rural nation, with two-thirds of its people and 70% of its workforce living in rural regions. The rural sector accounts for 46 percent of the national income. Notwithstanding the increase in urbanization, over fifty percent of India's population is anticipated to remain rural by 2050. Consequently, the advancement and expansion of the rural economy and population are essential for the comprehensive growth and inclusive development of the nation.

Overview of the National Education Policy in context of Rural Education:

NEP 2020, with its lofty vision and holistic strategy, seeks to rectify the deficiencies of the current system while aspiring for a future in which every student has access to inclusive and high-quality education (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). It establishes ambitious targets, including the universal provision of early childhood care and education, the assurance of fundamental literacy and numeracy, and the advancement of vocational education and lifetime learning possibilities (Jha & Parvati, 2020). NEP 2020 delineates various critical aspects pertinent to rural education, including a focus on early childhood care and education, fundamental reading and numeracy, vocational training, and the integration of technology in educational delivery. The NEP 2020 promotes a comprehensive approach to education, integrating cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development. This presents an opportunity to develop inclusive and culturally pertinent curricula and pedagogical methods for rural pupils. Indian higher education must undoubtedly be founded on comprehensive and transdisciplinary learning. To this purpose, the NEP advocates for the integration of the humanities and arts with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in undergraduate education (Jagadesh Kumar, 2020). Research indicates, as highlighted in NEP, that a comprehensive approach is likely to augment “creativity and innovation, critical thinking and higher-order cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and communication competencies,” all of which are vital for active learning, in addition to fostering social and moral awareness.

NEP 2020 proposes several structural reforms, including the restructuring of school education into a 5+3+3+4 curricular structure (Foundational, Preparatory, Middle, and Secondary stages), with a flexible approach to curriculum and pedagogy (Weblink 1). It advocates for a transition from rote memorization to conceptual comprehension and application-focused assessment techniques, emphasizing formative assessment and alleviating examination-related stress. The NEP advocates for education in the mother tongue or local language until at least Grade 5, facilitating improved comprehension of topics for kids in rural regions. Local craftspeople, farmers, and custodians of traditional knowledge can utilize as resource individuals, generating indirect employment opportunities. Skill development and universal vocational education are essential strategies for capitalizing on our demographic dividend in the long term. The landscape of rural education in India is characterized by the simultaneous presence of various problems and opportunities. Rural regions constitute a significant segment of India's population, representing the majority of the nation's demographic composition. The youngsters in these areas are not just the future labour force but also essential to the nation's social structure. Nonetheless, their educational experiences have frequently been hindered by resource limitations, inadequately qualified instructors, and curricula that fail to sufficiently address their needs and objectives.

Education is an essential human right that imparts knowledge and skills to enhance employment, mitigate poverty, and foster health and well-being. Emphasizing rural educational institutions is essential, as they significantly contribute to the advancement of equal and inclusive education across the nation. The national school system has transformed into a predominantly rote learning, exam-oriented, and marks-centric framework, with a particular emphasis on the English language (Thakur et al., 2021). Currently, professional education is essential to higher education and skill-based learning is crucial for advancing professional education. NEP 2020 offers both opportunity and problems for rural youth. The incorporation of vocational education in schools could markedly enhance employability and economic autonomy in rural regions, where employment prospects are frequently confined to agriculture and low-paying labour. The absence of infrastructure, qualified vocational educators, and

access to industries for actual experience constitutes substantial obstacles. Rural regions frequently experience a digital divide, hence constraining the potential efficacy of NEP's technology-driven efforts (Sengupta & Gupta 2022).

NEP 2020 underscores the necessity of ongoing professional development for educators, encompassing training in innovative pedagogical techniques, integration of information and communication technology, and practices of inclusive education. Investing in teacher training and capacity development is crucial for enhancing the quality of education in rural schools. The NEP 2020 emphasises cooperative learning. There ought to be an exchange of academics, staff, and students among various institutions of higher education, as well as the sharing of resources and experiences (Yadav, 2021). This policy on Education was formulated to improve the quality of education nationwide, with the objective of offering educational opportunities to all citizens. The new education strategy aims to attract the most talented persons to the educational sector, thereby ensuring the maintenance of high standards in teaching and learning nationwide. The adaptable curricular framework established by NEP 2020 facilitates the incorporation of vocational education, experiential learning, and indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. The National Education Policy integrated the concept of "integrated medicine," encompassing Community Medicine and Preventive Medicine education, thereby equipping medical graduates with extensive knowledge and skills in various facets of Primary Health Care and Public Health, while emphasizing research activities (Thakur et al., 2021). This facilitates rural students in obtaining practical skills and knowledge pertinent to their environment and livelihoods (Smorvik & Vespestad, 2020). Despite the ongoing difficulty of the digital divide, NEP 2020 presents an opportunity to utilise technology for educational delivery in rural regions. Initiatives like digital classrooms, internet resources, and mobile learning platforms can improve access to quality education in distant regions.

National Education Policy and upliftment of Rural Economy:

Economic analyses of rural India have primarily concentrated on variations in rural employment, categorized by gender and at a general sectoral level between agriculture and non-agriculture. This study investigates long-term modifications in (a) the sectoral makeup of rural production and employment, (b) their interrelations and consequences for output expansion and employment, and (c) income disparities among sectors and between rural and urban areas. The idea of economic growth in rural areas has emerged as a subject of discourse both nationally and internationally. The term "rural economy" refers to the collective economy of the villages, which is made up of the structural units of agriculture and related activities. Rural regions include a substantial segment of India's populace, and providing quality education in these areas is essential for national growth and attaining socio-economic fairness. Rural education has various problems, such as insufficient infrastructure, a lack of teachers, and socio-economic inequalities. NEP 2020 constitutes a thorough and progressive framework designed to reform the Indian education system in accordance with modern realities and future ambitions. The New Education Policy introduces technological innovation across all domains, influencing policies, processes, educational institutions, work culture, and individual characteristics. Likewise, rural education is influenced by technology advancements.

The NEP 2020 incorporates vocational education into regular education starting from Grade 6, including practical skills training and exposure to many trades and professions. It underscores the significance of skill enhancement for employment and entrepreneurship. NEP can explore local crafts, agriculture, traditional knowledge systems, and entrepreneurship (Kumar, 2021). The policy acknowledges the transformative capacity of technology in education and advocates for its extensive incorporation into teaching and learning processes. Rural youth can acquire hands-on skills (carpentry, pottery, agriculture technology, food processing, tailoring, renewable energy, etc.), making them employable locally. It also promotes the establishment of digital infrastructure and resources to facilitate online and hybrid learning. The NEP 2020 underscores the significance of research and innovation in fostering educational excellence and socio-economic advancement. It advocates for reforms in higher education to cultivate a culture of research and innovation, encompassing the creation of multidisciplinary institutions and colleges.

Recent trends in education have emphasized the cultivation of abilities in pupils. Consequently, numerous skill enhancement courses have been implemented. In this set up classrooms will become more hands-on and collaborative, with students and teachers working together and sharing ideas in a more dynamic way. The overall concept of Skill-Enhancement Courses centers on intensive training, competencies in applied interpersonal relationships, habits, values, career development, and skills for enhancing mental well-being, such as resilience, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms. Commencing with occupational exposure at early stages of middle and secondary schooling, high-quality vocational training will be seamlessly incorporated into higher education. It will guarantee that each child acquires

proficiency in at least one vocation and is introduced to several others. This would result in emphasizing the dignity of labour and the significance of several occupations related to Indian arts and craftsmanship (Kumar, 2022). NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of providing students with practical, hands-on skills that correspond with industrial requirements. This methodology transcends theoretical education, emphasizing practical applications and problem-solving skills. Integrating skill development across subjects provides pupils with a comprehensive and versatile education.

Agriculture has always been the primary sector of the rural economy and rural employment. The shift in output and employment from agriculture to more productive non-farm sectors is regarded as a significant driver of economic growth transformation in the rural and overall economy. Nonetheless, no substantial effort has been undertaken to examine and comprehend the transformation in India's rural economy. NEP 2020 provides several opportunities to learn the techniques for the betterment of agriculture. Several curricula related to agroforestry, manufacture of biofertilizer, vermicompost preparation, mushroom cultivation, pisciculture, apiculture etc., are available in this system. All of these can boost rural economy (Agarwal and Kumar, 2020; Roy and Sarkar, 2021). NEP emphasizes the significance of incorporating vocational education and skill development into conventional learning, with taxation skills being a crucial component of this objective. The NEP seeks to equip students for real-world difficulties by incorporating practical understanding of taxation, accounting, and financial literacy into secondary and higher education curricula. For rural students, acquiring taxation skills is particularly advantageous, as it enables them to run small businesses, self-employment initiatives, and agricultural operations more effectively. It also creates chances in local consultancies, banking, and financial services, so enhancing both individual livelihoods and the rural economy. NEP, 2020 also emphasizes skill-based learning and vocational training to bridge the gap between education and employment. For village students, it opens up new avenues of industrial training by linking schools and higher education institutions with local industries, agro-based units, and small-scale enterprises. This practical exposure not only equips rural youth with hands-on experience but also enhances their employability and entrepreneurial abilities. By promoting digital literacy, internships, and skill-development programs, the NEP ensures that village students can actively participate in the growing industrial sector, thereby fostering rural development and reducing migration to cities.

CONCLUSION

Education is a crucial cornerstone for the future of civilisation and thus the education system must be meticulously structured to effectively promote societal growth across multiple dimensions. Connecting academic education with skill-based training can improve employment opportunities in rural areas. The new education policy in India has positively influenced rural education. It has enhanced access to quality education and expanded opportunities for pupils in remote regions. It has also urged educational institutions to concentrate on creating novel and innovative teaching methodologies, and advocated for the integration of technology in the classroom. The policy has promoted the incorporation of vocational education into the conventional educational framework and has enhanced the quality of educators in rural regions. The current approach emphasises the comprehensive development of pupils through multidisciplinary and outcome-oriented education. If effectively conceived and executed, it will establish India as a global education hub in near future.

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