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## **Reform and Reality: NEP 2020 vs. NPE 1986 in the Context of Indian Education**

**Mr. Ashokkumar Baldevbhai Prajapati**

Assistant Professor

Soorajba College of Education, Kadi, Dist: Mahesana, Gujarat (India)

Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya University, Gandhinagar

[ORCID ID : 0009-0003-5670-5798](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5670-5798)

Email : [ashok221086@gmail.com](mailto:ashok221086@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the evolution of educational policies in India, focusing on the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NPE 1986 was introduced to promote equality and access to education, emphasizing vocational training, technical education, and the eradication of disparities. However, it largely maintained a content-heavy, examination-centric approach, which led to challenges in fostering critical thinking and creativity. In contrast, NEP 2020 represents a paradigm shift towards a more holistic, flexible, and inclusive education system. It emphasizes competency-based learning, critical thinking, and the integration of technology to prepare students for the 21st-century global landscape. By comparing the objectives, curricular approaches, assessment methods, and inclusivity measures of both policies, this paper highlights the transformative vision of NEP 2020. It also discusses the challenges and realities of implementing such ambitious reforms, drawing lessons from the implementation of NPE 1986 to provide insights for the successful realization of NEP 2020's goals. This paper underscores the importance of adapting education policies to meet the evolving needs of society and the global knowledge economy.

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, NPE 1986, Curriculum Development, Assessment Reform, Inclusivity in Education, Educational Reform

## Introduction

Education serves as the cornerstone of national development, shaping the future of societies and economies. In India, the evolution of educational policies reflects the changing priorities and aspirations of the nation. Two pivotal policies in this trajectory are the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020. Both policies represent significant milestones in the Indian education system, yet they address different challenges and aspirations in their respective eras. The NPE 1986 was introduced during a period marked by socio-economic transition and the need for educational reform. At that time, India faced numerous challenges, including disparities in educational access, a focus on rote learning, and the necessity to align education with national development goals. The primary objectives of NPE 1986 were to promote national integration, ensure equitable access to education, and address gender and social inequalities. The policy emphasized the importance of vocational education and technical skills to support the country's industrial growth, reflecting the economic priorities of the 1980s. It also aimed to enhance teacher education and integrate technology into schools to improve educational outcomes. The implementation of NPE 1986 encountered several challenges. The policy's focus on standardized examinations and content-heavy curricula often led to an education system that prioritized memorization over critical thinking. Furthermore, disparities in educational access persisted, particularly for marginalized communities. The vision of a common school system and the eradication of gender disparities were hampered by inadequate funding and infrastructural limitations. These issues highlighted the need for a more nuanced approach to education reform. NEP 2020, the educational landscape in India had

changed dramatically. Rapid technological advancements, globalization, and a growing emphasis on skills and innovation necessitated a new approach to education policy. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emerged as a response to these evolving needs. NEP 2020 marks a significant departure from its predecessor, focusing on creating an education system that is inclusive, flexible, and oriented towards holistic development. The policy aims to transform Indian education by fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, preparing students for the complexities of the 21st century. One of the key innovations of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on a competency-based approach to education. The policy introduces a new curricular structure, known as the 5+3+3+4 system, which aligns with cognitive developmental stages and aims to provide a more balanced and comprehensive education. This structure replaces the traditional 10+2 system, focusing on early childhood care and education (ECCE), foundational literacy and numeracy, and the integration of vocational education at the secondary level. NEP 2020 also advocates for the reduction of curriculum content to core essentials, allowing for deeper learning and the development of critical skills. Another significant shift in NEP 2020 is its approach to assessment. Moving away from high-stakes examinations, the policy promotes continuous and comprehensive evaluation methods that emphasize student growth and learning. Formative assessments, project-based evaluations, and digital tools are encouraged to provide a more accurate picture of students' abilities and progress. This approach aligns with the policy's broader goal of reducing academic stress and fostering a more supportive learning environment. NEP 2020 takes a proactive stance on ensuring equitable access to education for all, including children with

special needs and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The policy proposes the establishment of Special Education Zones (SEZs) in underserved areas and emphasizes the use of technology to bridge educational gaps. This focus on inclusivity builds upon the foundational efforts of NPE 1986 but aims to address the shortcomings identified during its implementation. This paper a comparative analysis of NEP 2020 and NPE 1986, examining how the latter's goals and strategies have influenced the current policy. By evaluating the objectives, curricular approaches, assessment methods, and inclusivity measures of both policies, the paper seeks to understand how NEP 2020 builds upon and diverges from its predecessor. Additionally, it will address the challenges of implementing NEP 2020 and provide insights into how the lessons learned from NPE 1986 can inform the successful realization of NEP 2020's transformative vision. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolution of educational policy in India and its implications for the future of education.

**OBJECTIVES:**

The NEP 2020 has many initiatives to improve the quality and the broadness of the education system in India.

The objectives of this study are as under:

- To Highlight Salient Features of NPE 1986.
- To Highlight Salient Features of NEP 2020.
- To Compare NEP 1986 with NEP 2020 in India.
- To understand the brief Outline of NEP 2020's innovative proposal.
- To understand the benefits and drawbacks of NEP 2020.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The paper is qualitative and theoretical in nature. The paper is based on secondary data collected from various journals, newspapers, and websites. The methodology consists of a conceptual discussion on the highlights of the NEP 2020 and NPE 1986. The focus of this article is the comparison of NPE 1986 with the current educational policy of India NEP 2020

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

The NEP 2020's approach to higher education aligns better with the changing demands of society and the job market. Its emphasis on multidisciplinary learning, research, technology, and flexibility equips students to excel in a rapidly evolving global landscape and contribute effectively to innovation and development.

**TO HIGHLIGHT SALIENT FEATURES OF NPE 1986**

The Government of India reviewed the prevailing education system in 1985 and the policy was articulated in the document "Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective". Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the National Policy on Education in May 1986. The new education policy was intended to prepare India for the 21st century.

1. Access, Enrolment, and Retention of all children up to the age of 14 years in the schools
2. Quality improvement of education by improving the school environment, child-centered and activity centered teaching methodology, continuous evaluation throughout the year, removal of all kinds of physical punishment, continuing the practice of not failing the students in any class at the elementary level, and arranging the essential facilities in primary schools
3. Setting up of Navodaya Vidyalaya was another landmark in the history of education
4. The policy emphasized on inclusion of motor-handicapped children in normal

schools and the arrangement of special schools at district headquarters.

5. NPE 1986 proposed a national system of education based on the accepted structure of 10+2+3.

6. Primary schools be opened in remote areas including ashrams or residential schools in tribal regions. 7. Arranging non-formal education for children, who left the schools, in between, or are residing at places not having schools

8. It suggested that the +2 stage be accepted as part of school education throughout the country.

9. It also extended the Open University system with the inauguration of the Indira Gandhi National Open University in 1985

10. emphasized adult education and the development of new schools and universities.

11. Reorientation of the system to promote gender equality, employment of teachers from oppressed groups, and disabled persons

12. The NPE and POA elaborately discussed the concept of language development and emphasized the adoption of regional languages as the medium of instruction at the university stage. The mother tongue should be the medium of instruction at the school stage

13. Selected Secondary Teacher Education Institutes should be upgraded to complement the work of the State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT)

14. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) should be provided with the necessary resources and capability to accredit institutions of teacher education and to provide guidance regarding curricula and methods

15. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) need to be established with the capability to organize pre-service and in-service courses for elementary

school teachers and non-formal and adult education

16. Equal educational opportunities especially for women and reserved communities.

17. From expanding scholarships to recruiting more teachers from the reserved categories and incentives for poor families to send their children to school regularly

18. The Policy had some important features like common school curriculum, minimum levels of learning, value education, the role of media and education technology, work experience, emphasis on teaching Mathematics and Science, Sports, and Physical Education

### **TO HIGHLIGHT SALIENT FEATURES OF NEP 2020**

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes various reforms in school education as well as higher education including technical education. Several action points/activities for implementation in school education as well as higher education are mentioned in the National Education Policy 2020. Details of the salient features of NEP 2020 are as follows

1. Ensuring Universal Access at All Levels of schooling from pre-primary school to Grade 12.

2. Ensuring quality early childhood care and education for all children between 3-6 years.

3. New Curricular and Pedagogical Structure (5+3+3+4)

4. No hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams.

5. Emphasis on promoting multilingualism and Indian languages; The medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.

6. Assessment reforms - Board Exams on up to two occasions during any given



school year, one main examination and one for improvement

7. Establishing National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy 8. Equitable and inclusive education - Special emphasis is given to socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SDGs)

9. Robust and transparent processes for recruitment of teachers and merit-based performance

10. Setting up of a new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development

11. Setting up of State School Standards Authority (SSSA)

12. Exposure to vocational education in school and higher education system

13. Increasing GER in higher education to 50%

14. Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education with multiple entry/exit options

15. Establishment of Academic Bank of Credit

16. Setting up of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) and National Research Foundation (NRF)

17. A separate Gender Inclusion fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups

18. NTA to offer Common Entrance Exam for Admission to HEIs

19. Expansion of open and distance learning to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

20. The Centre and the States will work together to increase public investment in the Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest

21. Single overarching umbrella body for the promotion of the higher education sector including teacher education and excluding medical and legal education- the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)-with independent bodies for standard setting- the General Education Council; funding-Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC); accreditation- National Accreditation Council (NAC); and regulation- National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC)

22. Professional Education will be an integral part of the higher education system creation of an autonomous body.

23. National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to provide a platform for the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, and administration.

24. Strengthening of the Central Advisory Board of Education to ensure coordination to bring overall focus on quality education.

### COMPARISON BETWEEN NPE 1986 & NEP 2020:

DIMENSIONS	NPE 1986	NEP 2020
Released By	Govt. of India, Ministry of Education	Ministry of Human Resource Development
GER Ratio	Gross Enrolment Ratio- 26.3% (2018)	Gross Enrolment Ratio -50% (2035)
Academic Structure	10+2 format	5+3+3+4 format
Age Break	The break-up of age: 6-16, 16-18	Break-up of age: 3- 8, 8-11, 11-14, 14- 18

Languages	3 languages Hindi, English, and the regional	3 language- by state, region, and choice of student
Stream Separation	Hard separation- Art, Commerce, Science	No hard separation between Art, Commerce, and Science. All will be mixed with the curriculum
Board Exam	Based on memorizing, facts used to be held once a year	Based on core competencies students are allowed to take the exam twice a year
School Education	The elementary system comprising 5 years of primary and 3 years of upper primary and 2 years of high school education	School education would be 12 years of schooling with 3 years of Anganwadi /pre primary
Report Card	Report card to have reviewed by teachers	Report card to have reviewed by teachers, peers, and students
Percent of GDP	Education sector to get 4.5% of the GDP	Education sector to get 6% of the GDP
E-Courses	Introduction of elective computer science courses at a higher secondary level during the 7th Plan	E-courses will be developed in regional languages and virtual labs will be developed and a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) is being created
PTR	At the primary level the PTR should be 30:1 and at the upper primary level it should be 35:1	A pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of under 30:1 will be ensured at the level of each school.
Test Conducted by	A National Examination Reform Framework would be prepared to serve as a set of guidelines to the examining bodies which would have the freedom to innovate and adapt the framework to suit the specific situations	National Testing Agency (NTA)- It will conduct aptitude tests and exams in the science, humanities, languages, arts, and vocational subjects,
Credit Scoring	Nothing said about Credit Scoring	Multiple entry and exit options for incomplete courses. Their credits will be transferred through Academic Bank Credits (ABC)

Aims of Higher Education	The main objective of the National Policy of Education of 1986 and Programme of Action, of 1992 was to establish a national system of education that implies that all students irrespective of caste; creed, sex, and religion have access to education of comparable quality	It aims at building the overall personality of students by strengthening infrastructure for open and distance learning, and online education and increasing the use of technology in education
MPhil Degree	First M.Phil., then Doctorate could be pursued	New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the government has advised that the MPhil program should be discontinued.
Controlling Authority	Controlling Authority UGC, AICTE (Technical), ICAR (Agriculture), BCI (Legal), CCIM (Medical), ICAI, ICSI, CBSE, NCERT, etc.	Controlling Authority- HECI (Higher Education Commission of India) except Medical and Legal. Divided into 4 parts: National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for standard setting, Higher Education Grant's Council (HEGC) for funding and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation
Adult Education	NPE envisages that adult education would be a means for reducing economic, social, and gender disparities. The principal aim of the new National Programme of Adult Education (NPAE) is to provide education including literacy, to the population in the 15-35 age group, which numbers about 100 million	Strong and innovative government initiatives for adult education - in particular, to facilitate community involvement and the smooth and beneficial integration of technology
Vocational Education	Vocational Education has received a top priority in the NPE 1986, Vocational education will be a distant stream that intends to prepare children	According to NEP 2020, by 2025, at least 50% of learners shall have vocational exposure through school and higher education. Every child is



	for different occupations across various areas of activity.	supposed to learn at least one vocation and be exposed to several more
Curriculum	The curriculum was designed by Curriculum Development Centres (CDCs), and various CDCs were to be set up to foster the needs of specialization and application oriented study	New Curricular and Pedagogical Structure: With an emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education, Accreditation norms are to be made to categorize the autonomous colleges and universities into Research oriented and Teaching oriented based on their curriculum
Teachers Training	Policies were made for the training of teachers for all levels from elementary schooling to higher education	4-yr., 2-yr., and 1- yr. B.Ed. programs to be provided by all HEIs based on the no. of years the candidate has taken up under graduation
E-content	Lack of regional language e-content	E-content in total 8 languages
Multiple entry and exit options	This is the main difference between both the policies with credit storing for higher studies	Multiple entry and exit options for incomplete courses. Their credits will be transferred through Academic Bank of Credits
multidisciplinary institution	No such policy	At least one large multidisciplinary institution in or near every district by the year 2030
IIT	No such policy	IITs will include multidisciplinary like arts, humanities etc.
<b>Bag less policy</b>	No such policy	Bag- less days encouraged
Exam	Exam- Each year up to class 12	Exam- class 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
Pedagogical Structure	10 + 2 + 3	5 + 3 + 3 + 4
Degree Completion	The degree will be provided After 3 or 4 Years	Offers multiple options with 1 year of training and 2 years of diploma
Vocational Studies	No such policy	From class 6th, along with an internship
Entrance Test	Multiple	One

Scores	Based on secured marks	Based on 360° Performance Evaluation
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**To understand the brief Outline of NEP 2020's innovative proposal.**

**Outline of School education:**

1. The existing "10+2" school education structure will be replaced with a "5+3+3+4" structure, consisting of the Foundational Stage (in two parts, that is, 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school + 2 years in primary school in Grades 1-2; both covering ages 3-8), Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8, covering ages 11-14), and Secondary Stage (Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first and 11 and 12 in the second, covering ages 14-18).

2. Instead of exams being held every academic year, school students will only attend three exams, in classes 2, 5, and 8.

3. Board exams for classes 10 and 12 will continue to be held, but they will be redesigned. Exams will be divided into two categories: objective and descriptive. These tests will be held twice a year to make them easier.

4. A new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), will be established as a standard-setting organisation for setting norms, standards, and guidelines for student assessment and evaluation.

5. NCERT will create a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children aged birth to eight years old.

6. Regional language or mother tongue to be used as the medium of instruction at least through Class 5 and ideally through Class 8.

7. The policy's goals are to reduce students' curricular loads and allow them to be more "inter-disciplinary" and "multilingual." "For example, if a student wishes to

combine fashion studies with physics or bakery studies with chemistry, they will be able to do so.

8. Beginning in Class 6, coding and vocational education will be introduced. 9. Breakfasts will be included in the Midday Meal Scheme.

10. NEP 2020 highlights the importance of the early years in order to ensure that all children aged 3-6 years get quality early childhood care and education by 2025.

**Outline of Higher education:**

1. It promotes a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary undergraduate education with many entry-exit choices. The bachelor's degree programme might last three or four years. These will be implemented in the following manner:

- After completing one year in a discipline, a certificate will be awarded.
- After completing two years of education, a diploma will be awarded.
- Upon completion of the three-year programme, a bachelor's degree will be conferred.
- The four-year interdisciplinary Bachelor's degree will remain the favoured choice.

2. A Master's degree can be earned in as little as one or two years. A one-year extension is available to students who have completed a four-year bachelor's degree with research. Two years will be available to those who have completed a three-year bachelor's degree.

3. The M.Phil. program will be discontinued.

4. To govern higher education, the Higher Education Council of India (HECI) would be created. There will be four separate verticals under HECI:

- HECI's initial vertical will be the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). Its goal is to govern higher education, which includes teacher

education but excludes medical and legal education. • HECI's second vertical, the National Accreditation Council (NAC), will be a "meta-accrediting body." • HECI's third vertical, the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), will be in charge of higher education funding and finance.

• HECI's fourth vertical will be the General Education Council (GEC), which will determine desirable learning objectives for higher education programmes.

5. A computerised Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) will be created to record academic credits earned by students.

6. By 2025, at least half of all students will be able to receive vocational education through schools and higher education institutions.

7. To raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education, including vocational education, from 26.3 percent in 2018 to 50% by 2035.

8. Adding 35 million places to higher education.

9. In addition to the JEE Main and NEET, the National Testing Agency (NTA) will administer university entrance tests throughout the country.

10. India's education must be internationalised, according to the policy. In India, foreign institutions can now open campuses (the top 100 universities in the world would be given priority).

#### **Outline of Teacher education:**

1. In addition to the 4-year integrated B.Ed., the HEI may provide a 2-year B.Ed. for students with a Bachelor's degree in a specialised topic. Students with a four-year bachelor's degree in a specialised field may be eligible for a one-year B.Ed.

2. A new, comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education will be developed by the NCTE by 2021.

3. National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be developed by the

National Council of Teachers of Education (NCTE) by 2022.

#### **Other changes:**

1. The Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation, as well as the National Institutes for Pali, Persian, and Procrit, will be formed.

2. Education spending will increase from 4.6 percent of GDP to 6%.

3. To develop and give education to women and transgender individuals, a Gender Inclusion Fund will be established.

4. The Ministry of Human Resource Development will be transferred to the Ministry of Education.

#### **To understand the benefits and drawbacks of NEP 2020.**

##### **BENEFITS:**

1. The educational system's adaptability.

2. From class 6 onwards, there will be a greater emphasis on practical instruction.

3. Increasing education spending from 3% to 6% of GDP. Due to budgetary constraints, no student shall be denied access to higher education.

4. The interdisciplinary approach to syllabi allows students to excel in the fields they have chosen.

5. Higher education offers a variety of entry-exit alternatives.

6. Credit transfer options

7. There will be the establishment of an academic bank of credit.

8. Small children will no longer have to carry big baggage.

9. The higher education institution would get .35 crore additional seats. Enhanced computer skills from an early age. i.e., from 6th standards onwards, coding will be introduced.

##### **DRAWBACKS:**

1. Under this policy, the home language or regional language will be used as the medium of teaching until at least grade 5, but preferably until grade 8 and beyond.

The issue is with children whose parents work in transferable employment such as the army or paramilitary. How will they adjust?

2. Up until grade 5, there is less focus on the English language.

3. Beginning in class 6, coding is a required subject. But how is coding teaching conceivable in many Indian schools that lack computers and even electricity.

### CONCLUSION

The observations and recommendations of NEP 2020 are indeed progressive in nature. It gives a fresh look to the educational system which is inbuilt with flexibility and mark of quality that is capable of moulding India to a vibrant society which matches our rich cultural heritage. The NPE 1986, which created a pool of educational system and trained human resources who contributed to the value chain of development but NEP 2020 aspires of creating human resources who will generate value propositions. With the implementation of the new NEP 2020, the Indian education system is poised to become closer to international standards. In an online survey conducted across 1103 students in India, nearly 96.4% were optimistic about the results that come out of the implementation of new policy. The NEP, which is designed to ease the burden of classroom teaching and examination on students, will play an important role in creating the future of the country. Its success, however, lies in uniform and transparent implementation at all levels, with an equitable distribution of resources. This mammoth task can be realized only when there is 100% co-operation and collaboration between all the stakeholders backed by institutional mechanisms. The two previous national educational policies have helped to develop India's educational system, and the action plan for the third national educational policy is one of the platforms that will be used. The policy's

results will be evaluated using the outcomes of the current national education policy's action plan. If this policy focuses on the root causes of the issues and difficulties it faces, it will be effective.

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