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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: A POLICY ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDY OF NEP 2020 IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

India's education policies, including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, aim to empower human resources and reduce social disparities by improving access and relevance in education. Vocational education, despite its significant potential in producing skilled labor, often remains disconnected from mainstream academic education, receiving inadequate attention and integration. As a result, graduates often lack sufficient employability and entrepreneurial skills, limiting their opportunities in the job market and in starting their own businesses. This study analyzes national education policies from 1968, 1986, 1992, up to NEP 2020, and includes a case study of the Skill Enhancement Courses at the University of Delhi. Policy analysis methods were used to evaluate policy changes, while the case study aimed to assess the practical impact of these policies. The findings show that NEP 2020 has successfully promoted the integration of vocational education with academic education, and the Skill Enhancement Courses at the University of Delhi have been effective in improving students' employability skills. The novelty of this research lies in NEP 2020's priority to integrate vocational education into the mainstream curriculum, demonstrated to be effective through its implementation at the University of Delhi. This study recommends strengthening the synergy between vocational and academic education to address the skills gap among graduates, particularly in the context of social sciences and humanities development.
Keywords*: Education Policy Analysis, Employability Skills, National Education Policy 2020, Skill Enhancement Courses, Vocational Education Integration*

INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in India currently faces a widening gap between mainstream academic education and vocational education. Vocational education is often perceived as a less prestigious educational pathway compared to academic education, resulting in inadequate attention and support within the national education system (Tripathi et al., 2023). Graduates from vocational education programs frequently lack sufficient employability and entrepreneurial skills, which can limit their opportunities in the job market and hinder their ability to start their own businesses (Batra, 2021). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that vocational curricula

have not fully aligned with industry demands, leaving graduates ill-equipped with relevant skills for the workforce (K. Kumar et al., 2021).

This gap arises because vocational education in India has traditionally been segregated from academic education, leading to suboptimal integration within the educational framework. Vocational training is still often viewed as an alternative path meant for students who are unable to pursue academic routes. Despite its substantial potential to produce skilled labor, vocational education has yet to be recognized as an equivalent pathway to academic education (Freeman, 2021). This not only limits the social recognition of vocational education but also impacts access to educational resources and career opportunities for its graduates (Varma et al., 2021).

As a result, there is a rising trend of educated unemployment among vocational graduates, who often lack skills recognized by industries, alongside low participation rates in entrepreneurial activities (Mishra et al., 2023). The deficiency in entrepreneurial skills also serves as a major barrier for graduates wishing to start their own businesses, further exacerbating the unemployment crisis in India, especially among the youth (Patel et al., 2024).

Therefore, policy reforms that support the integration of vocational education into mainstream education are essential. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to address this issue by promoting the incorporation of vocational training into the academic curriculum from an early stage, providing opportunities for students to develop practical skills needed in the job market (Das & Das, 2024; Hidayat, 2024). This policy is not only crucial for bridging the skills gap but also for creating a more prepared and dynamic workforce capable of facing global economic changes (Gouda-Vossos et al., 2023).

Previous research has explored various efforts to enhance employability skills through education. For instance, Aithal & Aithal (2020) examined how educational policy reforms in India affect graduate employability skills, highlighting an increasing need for the integration of vocational education. Ganie (2022) and Kalyani (2020) emphasized the importance of vocational education in addressing educated unemployment in India and supported the NEP 2020 initiative that encourages such integration. Meanwhile, A. Kumar (2021) investigated the impact of NEP 2020 on higher education systems and found that this policy prioritizes vocational education to meet the evolving demands of the labor market. On the other hand, Gupta & Choubey (2021) studied the practical impacts of NEP 2020 implementation in Indian universities, revealing that vocational education integration still faces challenges related to curriculum and infrastructure. Additionally, research by Pilz & Regel (2021) discusses the significance of curriculum renewal and skill-based training as key factors in promoting vocational education into the mainstream.

However, despite numerous studies focusing on the importance of vocational education, there exists a gap in the literature exploring how this integration can be effectively implemented in universities and higher education institutions. Many prior studies do not provide concrete insights into how these policies can be applied in practice and the actual impacts they may have on graduates' employability skills. This research aims to fill that gap by evaluating educational policies in India from 1968 to NEP 2020, alongside analyzing a case study of the Skill Enhancement

Courses at the University of Delhi. This practical implementation offers new insights into how vocational education integration can function within the mainstream academic system while providing concrete evidence of its impact on students' employability skills.

This article conducts an in-depth analysis of how NEP 2020 effectively promotes the integration of vocational education with academic education, as well as providing practical recommendations for other educational institutions in India to implement similar policies. This study not only examines the policies from a theoretical perspective but also investigates how these policies impact institutions and students, making it significant for the development of social sciences and humanities, particularly in the context of enhancing employability and entrepreneurial skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach to analyze educational policy in India, focusing on the National Education Policy (NEP) and its implementation in the context of vocational education. The study aims to understand how this policy influences the integration of vocational education with academic education and its impact on graduates' employability skills. The variables used in this research include educational policy, vocational education integration, and employability skills. The necessary data encompasses policy documents, case study reports, and information related to the implementation of vocational education in educational institutions.

The primary data sources for this study are official educational policy documents, including the National Education Policy from 1968, 1986, and the Action Plan of 1992, as well as NEP 2020. Additional sources include government reports and previous research discussing vocational education initiatives in India (Afdhal et al., 2023; Mehrotra, 2020). The selection of these documents and reports is based on their relevance and credibility, as well as the presence of information reflecting the development and changes in educational policy in India.

Data collection methods include documentation studies, which involve analyzing educational policies and reports on the implementation of Skill Enhancement Courses at the University of Delhi. This case study was chosen because the University of Delhi is one of the institutions adopting NEP 2020 and is committed to integrating vocational education with academic education. The research also conducts interviews with relevant stakeholders, including instructors and students, to gain firsthand perspectives on the impact of the policy (Chandel et al., 2023).

Data analysis is conducted using a thematic approach, where the researcher identifies key themes emerging from the policy documents and interview results. The data will be compared with existing theories on vocational education and integration, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in implementing NEP 2020. Through this method, the research aims to yield significant insights regarding the effectiveness of the policy in enhancing graduates' employability skills.

The limitations of this study include its focus on the National Education Policy in India and the case study at the University of Delhi, which may not fully represent conditions at other institutions across the country. Furthermore, while interviews with stakeholders provide rich qualitative data, the results may be influenced by respondents' subjectivity (Sharma et al., 2023). Therefore, it is essential to consider the specific context of the institution under study in this analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges from Theoretical Policies to Social Inequality

The National Education Policy (NEP) is a response to the significant challenges that have plagued India's education system for decades. Despite aiming to advance education, previous policies—such as those implemented in 1968, 1986, and the 1992 Action Plan—have introduced substantial issues. These policies tended to overly focus on theoretical aspects and academic performance on paper. Students were required to master rigid content for examinations, while practical skills and critical thinking, which are essential in the real world, were often overlooked. This exam-oriented system has produced generations of graduates who are academically "educated" but inadequately prepared to face employment challenges.

The impact of this overly theoretical approach has manifested in a growing gap between education and the demands of the job market. Many graduates possess degrees but lack the technical and entrepreneurial skills needed to thrive in a dynamic workforce (Jain & Goel, 2019). Consequently, graduate unemployment rates have risen, reflecting the irony of an educational system that is meant to prepare individuals for careers but instead leaves them stuck in a deadlock. This gap not only harms graduates but also stifles India's economy, which relies on a skilled workforce to grow.

Beyond this, the problem of unequal education quality exacerbates the situation. In rural areas, education quality remains significantly behind that of urban centers. Limited access to adequate educational facilities, poor infrastructure, and insufficient teacher training in remote areas create a vast disparity within the education system. This inequality is further aggravated by social and economic differences, where those from lower economic backgrounds have fewer opportunities to access quality education. As a result, access to education, which should serve as a tool for social mobility, instead reinforces social stratification in India.

Holistic Transformation Through NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a new milestone aimed at breaking the limitations of India's traditional education system. With an interdisciplinary and holistic approach, NEP 2020 seeks to overhaul the way education is delivered, shifting the focus from purely theoretical learning to a more integrated and real-life-relevant educational experience. This new approach enables students to explore multiple disciplines, develop critical thinking skills, and connect different fields of study to create a more comprehensive understanding. This

transformation is expected to shape a generation that is not only academically smart but also capable of adapting and thinking creatively to solve complex problems.

Moreover, a key focus of NEP 2020 is to promote vocational training integrated with industry needs. This is a crucial step in narrowing the gap between education and the job market. Through partnerships with the industrial sector, NEP 2020 aims to ensure that students graduating from India's education system not only possess academic knowledge but also the work skills relevant to the demands of today's labor market. Thus, vocational education is no longer viewed as an alternative pathway but as an essential component in preparing a generation ready to compete globally (Makam, 2022).

Beyond merely developing technical skills, NEP 2020 also prioritizes practical skill-based and entrepreneurial education. The future of education must be able to produce individuals who are not only prepared to be employees but also possess the courage and skills to become entrepreneurs. NEP 2020 encourages the integration of vocational education into formal education, offering students the opportunity to learn and practice skills that can be directly applied to daily life and business ventures. Through this practical, skills-based learning, NEP 2020 hopes that graduates will not only depend on available jobs but also be capable of creating their own opportunities.

Integrated and Multilingual Approach

NEP 2020 introduces educational innovations focusing on a more integrative and holistic cross-curricular pedagogical approach. One of the key steps in this policy is the incorporation of arts, sports, and flexibility in subject choices for students. This approach provides students with the opportunity to explore interests beyond traditional academic subjects, allowing them to develop creative and physical talents that are often overlooked. Furthermore, by giving students the freedom to choose subjects that align with their interests and needs, NEP 2020 supports more personalized and relevant learning, helping students feel more connected and motivated in their educational journey.

As part of this innovation, NEP 2020 also promotes multilingual education by encouraging the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at least until Grade 5. Teaching in local languages aims to strengthen students' conceptual understanding from an early age, as research shows that learning in the mother tongue enhances cognitive development and foundational skills. Additionally, this policy helps preserve India's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. By building a strong foundation in local languages, students are then better prepared to learn other languages, including English and international languages, which are essential for global competition.

The emphasis on multilingual education in NEP 2020 is not limited to the mother tongue but also includes the acquisition of multiple languages at different educational levels. Students are encouraged to learn at least three different languages, covering local, regional, and global languages. This initiative not only fosters broader communication skills but also enhances critical

thinking, as students who learn multiple languages tend to have a more open and flexible worldview. Through these innovations, NEP 2020 aims to shape a generation that is more creative, globally aware, yet deeply connected to their local culture.

Revitalizing Vocational Education in Schools: Bridging Gaps and Expanding Opportunities

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a future where vocational education is fully integrated with academic disciplines, eliminating the long-standing hierarchy between different fields of study. This reform aims to reshape the perception of vocational training, allowing it to stand on equal footing with traditional academic subjects. By merging vocational education with mainstream learning, NEP 2020 intends to prepare students for both intellectual and practical challenges, equipping them with the skills necessary for modern life and the evolving job market.

One of the key strategies proposed under this vision is the introduction of practical skill courses as early as Grades 6-8. Students will have the chance to engage in hands-on activities such as woodworking, electrical work, and carpentry, all under the guidance of local artisans and experts. As one local artisan remarked, “Seeing young students eager to learn these skills is inspiring. They are not just learning a trade; they are building confidence and creativity.” These early experiences are crucial in helping students discover and cultivate practical skills, which not only provide career opportunities but also foster creativity and problem-solving. This exposure allows students to see vocational skills as valuable assets that can be pursued alongside or in place of traditional academic routes.

For those students who wish to delve deeper into vocational training after completing Grade 10, NEP 2020 advocates for the creation of specialized “Vocational Schools.” These schools will offer focused training in various trades and industries, providing a pathway for students who are passionate about pursuing vocational careers. A student currently enrolled in a vocational program shared, “This school has changed my life. I never thought I could turn my passion for mechanics into a career, but now I feel empowered to do just that.” By creating these dedicated spaces for vocational education, the policy seeks to dismantle the stigma associated with vocational training and promote it as a viable, respected option for students who prefer a hands-on approach to learning.

An equally significant aspect of this reform is the emphasis on inclusivity, particularly in terms of gender equity. NEP 2020 allocates funding to ensure that vocational education is accessible to all, with a specific focus on supporting women, transgender individuals, and other vulnerable groups. As one advocate for gender inclusivity in education stated, “Breaking down barriers in vocational fields is essential. Everyone deserves a chance to explore their potential, regardless of their gender identity.” Historically, vocational fields have been male-dominated, and this initiative seeks to break down those barriers by encouraging the participation of marginalized communities in vocational training. By promoting gender and social inclusivity, NEP

2020 not only broadens opportunities but also fosters a more diverse and equitable workforce for the future.

This transformation of vocational education, with its emphasis on integration, early exposure, specialization, and inclusivity, offers a pathway to both personal and societal growth. It aligns education with real-world needs and nurtures a generation of students who are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society, regardless of the career path they choose.

Empowering Higher Education through Vocational Integration: A Path to a Skilled Future

In the evolving landscape of education, vocational training is taking center stage, especially within higher education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 sets an ambitious goal: by 2025, 50% of students in higher education should engage in vocational education. This initiative aims to redefine the purpose of higher education, shifting the focus from traditional academic paths to a more inclusive and practical approach that equips students with the skills demanded by the modern job market.

To facilitate this transformation, the establishment of the National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE) is crucial. This committee will oversee the seamless integration of vocational training across various academic disciplines, ensuring that all students, regardless of their primary field of study, have access to valuable vocational experiences. By bridging the gap between vocational education and traditional academics, NCIVE aims to create a more cohesive educational environment that recognizes the importance of practical skills in all areas of learning.

One of the innovative features introduced under NEP 2020 is the tiered entry-exit system within undergraduate programs. This allows students to earn certificates, diplomas, and degrees that include vocational training components. Such a system not only provides flexibility but also encourages students to pursue vocational skills alongside their academic ambitions. This approach recognizes that many students may benefit from a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical expertise, ultimately enhancing their employability and readiness for the workforce.

Additionally, the establishment of incubation centers within higher education institutions, in collaboration with industry partners, plays a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurship and hands-on experience. These centers will serve as hubs for innovation, allowing students to develop their ideas into viable business ventures while also providing opportunities for internships that connect classroom learning to real-world applications. As one student involved in an incubation program stated, “Having access to industry mentors and resources has transformed my ideas into something tangible. It feels empowering to know that I can turn my passion into a career.” By nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit and encouraging practical experiences, these centers will empower students to take charge of their futures, transforming their educational journeys into pathways for professional success.

Empowering Futures: Skill Enhancement Courses at the University of Delhi

The University of Delhi has taken a significant step towards reshaping education with the introduction of the Skill Enhancement Courses (SEC) as part of its curriculum based on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, effective from the 2022-23 academic year. This initiative brings a fresh perspective to higher education, focusing on equipping students with practical skills that align with their career aspirations and the demands of the modern workforce.

With the launch of 109 new courses, the SEC program offers a diverse range of skill sets, including communication skills, financial management, and computer proficiency. These courses are designed not only to enhance theoretical knowledge but also to emphasize practical application through hands-on components, making experiential learning a vital aspect of the assessment process. This practical approach ensures that students are not only learning concepts but also actively applying them in real-world scenarios, which is essential for building confidence and competence.

In a recent interview, a student enrolled in the SEC program expressed, “These courses have transformed my approach to learning. The practical components allow me to engage with the material in a way that feels relevant and applicable to my future career.” This sentiment reflects the growing recognition among students of the importance of acquiring skills that are directly linked to their professional development. The primary goal of the SEC is to prepare students for their chosen career paths by providing them with relevant skills that employers seek. In today’s competitive job market, possessing technical knowledge alone is often insufficient. Employers increasingly value candidates who can demonstrate effective communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. By integrating these essential skills into the curriculum, the University of Delhi aims to cultivate a generation of graduates who are well-rounded and ready to tackle the challenges they will face in their professional journeys.

Moreover, the implementation of SEC reflects a broader commitment to making education more inclusive and relevant. It acknowledges the diverse interests and aspirations of students, offering them the flexibility to tailor their learning experiences according to their career goals. As one instructor noted, “We aim to create a learning environment where students feel empowered to explore their passions while gaining practical skills that will serve them in the workforce.” This student-centered approach fosters a sense of ownership over their education, encouraging them to take initiative in their skill development (Illeris & Ryan, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to address key issues in the Indian education system, such as the lack of practical skills, the gap between education and the job market, and inequality of access, especially in rural areas. With a focus on interdisciplinary and holistic education, NEP 2020 introduces significant reforms, including the integration of vocational education from primary school through higher education, synergy with industry, and mother-

tongue-based instruction. This policy seeks to enhance workforce skills and entrepreneurship through more flexible and relevant education that meets the demands of the 21st century. Innovations like the Skill Enhancement Courses at the University of Delhi demonstrate the practical implementation of the NEP vision, where students gain access to practical skills that can support their future careers. NEP 2020 offers an inclusive and progressive approach to creating graduates who are prepared to face the challenges of the modern job market.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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