

Towards Implementing The NEP-2020 In Assam: Prospects And Challenges

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ABSTRACT

As stated in Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which India accepted in 2015, the global education development plan intends to "offer inclusive and equitable quality education and encourage lifelong learning opportunities for everyone" by 2030. The whole educational system will need to be reorganized to promote and encourage learning in order to achieve all of the main targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There have been several talks since the introduction of the National Policy on Education, 2020, with the goal of formulating methods for effectively carrying out the policy's instructions. This article attempted to discuss the opportunities and pitfalls of the New Education Policy with a focus on Assam.

Keywords: New Education Policy 2020, Assam, transformation, knowledge.

Introduction

The Year 2020 marks an exciting beginning of a new era for Indian higher education. National Education Policy 2020 aims to make way for large scale, transformational reforms in education sectors. The Union Cabinet adopted the NEP-2020 on July 29, 2020, after six years of discussion and revision, paving the path for large-scale, revolutionary reforms in education. This policy superseded the NPE 1986, which was 34 years old. As a result of the lack of substantial improvements in education during the last 34 years, only a rat race rather than applied knowledge evaluation has maintained. The focus will shift from "what to think" to "how to think" (Angadi, 2020).

This new education policy had made a serious attempt to address the issues of increasing intellectual abilities and harnessing the dividends of human capital. Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability are the foundations of NEP-2020, which would convert India into a "vibrant knowledge hub" by 2020. Education in India will be made more interdisciplinary and adaptable in order to better meet the demands of the 21st century, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in order to make India a dynamic knowledge society and a

worldwide knowledge superpower. The new India's basis will be built on a fresh approach to education. In this way, the students will become global citizens who are anchored in their principles. It is the goal of the National Education Program 2020 (NEP 2020) to encourage students to become more curious, interested, and logical thinkers via the use of invention-based, inquiry-based, and analysis-based methodologies.

According to the NEP, there would be no more rigorous distinctions between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, or vocational and academic streams in higher education. Pupils will choose studies from all streams to thrive in and find their aptitude and potential, a birthright denied to generations of students. Undergraduate degree courses will be 3 or 4 years long, with numerous exit possibilities including certificate, diploma, and bachelor's degree. After the fourth year, one can pursue a one-year Master's degree. So, even after an intermediate exit, one may always return at a later date to continue education, saving both the student and the institution time, energy, and resources. To facilitate the transfer of academic credits acquired from several HEIs, an Academic Bank of Credit will be formed.

With high-quality education for all, this National Education Policy sees India becoming a worldwide knowledge superpower. According to the Policy, our institutions' curriculum and pedagogy must foster in students a profound respect for the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional principles, a sense of national pride, and an understanding of one's tasks and responsibilities in a changing world. As a result of the Policy's goal, learners will gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions that represent a genuinely global citizen and promote human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being(NEP-2020, p 6).

Assam and its transformational reforms through NEP-2020

According to the 2011 Indian census, Assam has a literacy rate of 72.19 percent, with men accounting for 78.81 percent and females accounting for 67.27 percent. The literacy rate is lower than the national average, which stands at 74.04 percent. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), Assam has just one women's university and only 10.8% private-aided institutions. Assam is also the state with the largest percentage of male employees (81%) and female employees (19%). Recently, a survey by the National Statistical Office shows that Assam has a literacy rate of 85.9%, which puts it fifth in the country among states . The literacy disparity between men and women in Assam is 8.9 percentage points, with male literacy at 90.1 percent and female literacy at 81.2 percent¹. For a long time, students relied on 'permanent' government positions, but there is hope that after proper implementation of NEP-2020, this will no longer be the case. Traditional academic areas, especially at the college and university level, still dominate education. With little or no link to the national or global sector, domain-specific degrees are only useful for obtaining admission into a competitive job.

¹ <https://www.sentinelassam.com/north-east-india-news/assam-news/assam-among-the-top-5-states-in-national-literacy-rate-499959>

The Assam government decided to restructure the school curriculum system from 10+2 to 5+3+3+4. 5 years (pre-school) and 3 years (Classes 3,4 & 5) will fall under the Directorate of Elementary Education, 3 years (Classes 6, 7 & 8) and 4 years (Classes 9, 10, 11 & 12) will fall under the Directorate of Education. Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and his cabinet approved the new school system under Education Policy (NEP), 2020 to implement the NEP in the state by 2023².

The Government of Assam Secondary Education Department has decided to amalgamate/merge schools located on the same campus or nearby to provide standard teacher-student ratio, optimum employee services, reduced administrative costs, and other logistic support for schools. 701 ME, 58 MV, 324 LP and 2 JBS schools with 836 secondary schools have been approved so far³. It has distributed 1.34 crore free textbooks to more than 13 Lakh students studying in Classes IX to XII. They have waived off the admission and tuition fees for 1,16,191 students coming from economically weaker sections of society. Last year, the Government also launched the Abhinandan Education Loan Subsidy (AELS) scheme.

The state cabinet has resolved to eliminate the language barrier from the Civil Services test administered by the APSC. English and Assamese papers will be dropped if three requirements are met: the candidate must be an Assamese resident, his or her name must be on the Assam job exchange, and the candidate must be fluent in Assamese or other recognised Assamese languages. To provide excellent secondary education, the Assam government has introduced the smart class idea in 103 classrooms across 84 schools, which would improve teaching and learning. Teachers will have more time to connect with students as they will not have to waste time sketching or creating diagrams on the board. It is simpler to grasp and remember when kids have “Cognitive Learning Process”⁴.

Some Critical Issues to deal with

The National Education Policy (NEP—2020) has evolved into an Indian education Magna Carta. Our greatest issue is in implementing the Policy strategically. There is a need to develop a solid action plan that will result in the successful implementation of all policy recommendations within the specified timeframes.

e-infrastructure

In remote places, e-infrastructure and e-resources will be necessary, as e-learning is the way forward. To satisfy the goals of the NEP–2020 and address significant issues in classroom instruction, a comprehensive e-infrastructure will be required, which will comprise multimedia-based audiovisual technologies, expertise-driven online resources, and digital classrooms. This

² <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/assam-government-to-implement-new-education-structure-under-nep-1880445-2021-11-24>

³ <https://education.assam.gov.in/portlets/amalgamation-of-schools>

⁴ <https://education.assam.gov.in/portlets/smart-class-room>

will be a significant problem of Assam in the coming years, particularly in government-run institutions. The current education system in Assam is in a bad state. Except for a few private schools (whose prices are excessively exorbitant) and government schools like Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya, the remainder lack adequate computer teaching and computer facilities. Students from low-income families cannot afford these private institutions, thus they are denied access to them.

Structural Reforms

The state government has merged elementary and secondary education ministries, merged the Assam Board of Secondary Education and the Assam State Higher Secondary Education Council, and converted all high schools into higher secondary schools. The NEP abolishes the present system of colleges operating upper secondary classes in colleges or the practise of junior colleges for standards 11 and 12. Merging multiple institutions and upgrading high schools to upper secondary schools would create issues. Leadership skills of the Head teacher or Principals will be an influencing factor in the creation and successful management of the school complexes. The past experience shows that despite well-conceived idea of establishing school complexes, many states failed because of lack of understanding of the purpose and absence of leadership for proper organised planning and implementation. Administratively, these high schools can be turned into high schools, but if they don't have the right infrastructure and enough qualified teachers, students from low and middle-income families will either drop out or move to private high schools⁵.

Language

The National Education Policy (NEP) says that the medium of instruction for students in schools should be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language until at least Class 8. The rule will apply to both private and public schools, which means textbooks will be made available in home languages. In cases where home-language textbook material is not available, the language of the transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language wherever. Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said “From now on, up to class 5, the mother tongue will be taught. For classes 6 and up, the Assamese language will be taught”⁶. Teaching in home languages/ mother tongue in Assam will be very problematic because Assam has a large number of mother languages due to its indigenous populations. So, accommodating all communities in terms of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools is tough for the government.

Centralization of NEP

⁵ <https://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/challenges-of-nep-implementation-568057>

⁶ <https://www.financialexpress.com/education-2/new-education-policy-implementation-assamese-to-be-language-subject-up-to-class-10-nep-in-assam-from-2021/2059073/>

The states should have been consulted more before introducing the policy. It is also aligned that this policy promotes centralization because the policy has a point states that a new teachers' training board will be set up for all kinds of teachers in the country, and no state can change that. So, the powers have been made more centralized that the decision making regarding education would be done by the centre. In the context of the Indian democracy, Assam is a marginalized state because of its inconsequential representation in the parliament. This is further aggravated by an absence of leaders at the national level who belong to this state. The question that arises here is whether the state government is capable of acting pro-actively in the area of education.

The New Evaluation Method

The traditional assessment system has to be updated, and there is currently no consensus on how to do so. The existing method is based on a metaphorical assessment that has to be redesigned and will need a system that is extremely subjective, requiring a fair way of review. According to the new policy, school boards will be required to reinvent the evaluation method. Students will take school examinations in Grades 3, 5, and 8 which will be conducted by the appropriate authority. These examinations would test achievement of basic learning outcomes, through assessment of core concepts and knowledge from the national and local curricula. The Grade 3 examination, in particular, would test basic literacy, numeracy, and other foundational skills. Results of school examinations will be used only for developmental purposes of the National Education Policy 2020 system.

Establishment of Quality Colleges and Universities

The purpose of quality of higher education is more than just creating additional and significant opportunities for the employability and employment of individuals. It must ensure a more vibrant, socially engaged, and cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, and prosperous nation. Such a system will enable students to become well-rounded, ensure holistic growth and optimally develop both sides of their brains (artistic/creative and analytic).

Others

In Assam's government schools, children dropping out is a typical occurrence. Poverty, a lack of knowledge about the benefits of a proper education, and the sheer struggle involved in obtaining those benefits — long walks to distant schools, truant teachers, pitiful infrastructure, and low-quality pedagogy — often cause children and parents in poor communities to regard schooling as a low priority. Assam has a higher dropout rate than other states (the elementary school dropout rate here was 7.4 percent compared with the national average of 4.3 percent in 2014-15). Some government schools provide dismal education, which is partly to blame. In Assam, barely one-third of Standard V pupils could read a Standard II textbook⁷.

⁷ <https://horizons.tatatrusts.org/2020/august/tata-trusts-education-school-dropout-assam.html>

It may not be entirely baseless to think that Assam's educational institutions do not impart rigorous training to prepare the students for the challenges at the national level. A part of the problem is that the higher education institutions in Assam (except for IIT) do not bring in students and faculty from other states, particularly since 1980s, to make the environment competitive enough. With more higher education institutions that have wider reach beyond the state and regional borders, one can hope to build a more competitive environment that will breed leaders in science, technology, businesses, entertainment, and politics who could compensate for political under-representation and can make Assam's voice heard at the national level. In principle, the Assamese society could acquire a new identity as being the host of most forward looking twenty first century higher education.

Suggestions and Way Forward

Hiranya K. Nath ⁸writes in an article that the academic community in Assam has to be open-minded with a vision of the future. There will be a substantial demand for higher education in many explored and unexplored fields. This entails importing talents from outside the state, interacting with best minds in the world, and nurturing the talents from within the state. He emphasises that the establishment of higher education institutions in Assam should not be limited to meeting regional needs. Rather, it should be designed to meet rising demand across state, regional, and even national borders. It is commonly acknowledged that we currently live in a society where ideas and inventions are critical to advancement. The world's economy are becoming increasingly service-oriented. Information services have risen to the top of the service hierarchy. To meet the difficulties of this new social and economic order, a significant investment in higher education will be required. The job market in the twenty-first century will be characterised by constant retooling of the workforce.

Also, Many youngsters, especially in the poorer parts, cannot attend school. Children work in compelling situations. They can't afford full-time education. For these youngsters, non-formal education must be important. So it takes a lot of work. An comprehensive strategy is required here, as well as the state institutes of education.

Vocational subjects should be closely related to natural resources and industries available, firstly in the areas where the school or colleges is located and secondly, in the State. Vocationalization must have a science and technological bias. The State of Assam should also commit that a student with vocational bias would get engagement after completion of his course. In a state like Assam where only a few colleges or universities is providing vocational courses till now. There are a lot of potentialities in the state of Assam. The state government may establish several vocational programmes centred on tea, agriculture, and tourism. Additionally, disciplines such as information technology, retail management, and others might be included to pave the path for practical and

⁸ Associate Professor of Economics, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville,

beneficial education. However, vocational courses should ensure that students enrolling in them have opportunities for vertical and horizontal mobility.

The former education Minister Brindaban Goswami emphasised the need of using an integrated strategy to make the primary school the most appealing location in the village. A compound can be created around the primary school. A centre for adult education, a centre for non-formal and continuing education, a library, and a hobby centre would be part of the school complex.

The majority of Assam's lands are prone to flooding. High floods wreak havoc on schools in such places, inflicting significant damage to educational facilities. Damaged educational facilities have prevented flood-prone students from returning to their regular sessions. A better understanding of these practical issues is needed by the state government in rural regions in order to improve educational opportunities.

Participation of the public in educational planning not only aids in the development of more effective policies, but also recognises the role of social oversight, resulting in a renewed sense of responsibility on the part of teachers and members of the public.

It is critical to examine the Northeastern region's geographic advantage, particularly in light of the government's "look east or act east" strategy. Despite the fact that these requirements apply throughout the country, our educational programs in the region have only featured a few specific departments or courses. According to Prof K M Baharul Islam (2021) young people in the region are seldom aware of how to focus on entrepreneurship, professional professions, or even employment markets in the far east, especially with increased linkages with ASEAN nations. Educational institutions in this region may promote North East India's and Southeast Asia's shared cultural past and commerce pathways. Regional campuses may benefit from increased interactions, exchanges, and collaborative programs with ASEAN schools, exposing our students to a broader range of alternatives.

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