



EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 ON EQUITY ACCESS AND QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is an ambitious policy reform initiative in India to transform the higher education system through greater equity, access, and quality. In this study, the effects of NEP 2020 on these three areas of Higher education are assessed. A quantitative descriptive research design adopted with deductive approach and primary data were collected from 150 respondents (students, faculty, and Academic administrators) with a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed descriptively, t-test one sample, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The finding showed that the perceptions of the respondents were positive in all the dimensions, the highest mean score being in the dimension of quality followed by access and equity in the dimension of equity. The results further indicated statistically significant positive impacts of the policy on equitable educational opportunities, accessibility of higher education, and quality enhancement initiatives. The correlation analysis showed strong and positive correlations between equity, access, and quality, and the regression analysis revealed that all three parameters significantly predicted the overall effectiveness of the NEP 2020 with quality being the strongest predictor. The study concludes that while there has been a significant progress towards making higher education in India more inclusive, accessible, and quality in the context of NEP 2020, this study also offers important lessons for the policy makers, education institutions, and other stakeholders in the process of educational reform in India.

Keywords: *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Higher Education, Equity, Access, Quality, Educational Reform, Inclusive Education, India.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a fundamental pillar in the areas of social mobility, economic development, innovation and human capital development. Higher education systems are required to create equitable opportunities, ensure broad access and uphold high standards of quality in a rapidly changing global context, to meet the diverse needs of learners and society. The higher education system in India has experienced tremendous growth in the last few decades, however, issues of inequality in education, accessibility, regional disparities, employability, and quality assurance still remain. This has resulted in the need for action on these issues to achieve inclusive and sustainable national development.

The Government of India then acknowledged the need for comprehensive educational reform and launched the first major overhaul of the national education framework in more than 30 years, the 'NEP 2020'. The policy aims to re-imagine the education system based on a holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible and learner-centre approach. The emphasis of NEP 2020 is on access to higher education, equity for the disadvantaged, integration of technology into learning, promotion of research and innovation, modernization of curriculum and enhancement of employability skills. These reforms are designed to develop a higher education landscape which is globally competitive, inclusive and will meet current educational and socio-economic challenges.

One of the core principles of NEP 2020 is enhancing access and equity and quality in higher education. Access refers to actions that increase access to education, including the improvement of digital learning infrastructure, including increasing the number of learners enrolled, and enhance the reach of institutions; whereas equity refers to actions that are taken to ensure equal opportunities to learn for learners from diverse socio-economic, gender and regional backgrounds. Quality focuses on curriculum changes, multi-disciplinary learning, research strength, skills development and student outcomes. While the policy's intent is great, the amount of progress made may be a field of legitimate academic research, and requires careful assessment from the perspectives of the stakeholders inside higher education institutions.

The present study aims to examine the effect of the NEP 2020 on higher education in India, its contribution to ensuring equitable opportunities for different socio-economic, gender, and regional groups, its effectiveness in expanding access—through enrolment, inclusion, digital learning and institutional growth—and its impact on educational quality—with respect to curriculum reforms, multidisciplinary learning, research promotion, employability, and academic outcomes. The study through this assessment

wants to contribute empirical inputs on the effectiveness of NEP 2020 and its impact on the future of higher education in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Aithal and Aithal (2020) critically analyzed the implementation strategies of the NEP 2020 and its possibilities to bring a revolutionary change in Indian higher education system. The study emphasized on aspects of multidisciplinary education, restructuring of institutions, promotion of research and digital learning in the policy. For the success of these reforms there was a need to make higher education more accessible, inclusive and quality as the authors argued.

Kumar et al. (2021) discussed the visionary concept of NEP 2020 in reforming the Education system in India. The policy found to bring in substantial reforms which would improve the educational quality – flexible curricula, skill-based learning and multidisciplinary approaches. The authors were able to draw a conclusion that the NEP 2020 have offered an umbrella approach to enhance the educational outcomes and equip students with the challenges of the fast-changing global economic market.

Wanti et al. (2022) carried out a systematic review to identify the factors which affect access and equity in higher education. The study revealed that socio-economic background, institutional support, financial support and educational infrastructure were found to be significant factors that impacted students' access to higher education. The importance of policies that fosters inclusivity and minimize disparities in education to increase the participation and enhance the educational opportunity of marginalized groups were highlighted by the authors.

Camilleri (2021) reviewed systematically the service quality and performance in HEIs. The study found that the factors that influence the quality of education were curriculum relevance, effectiveness of teaching, technology usage, service to students and the performance of the school. The author proposed that continual efforts should be made to enhance students' satisfaction, achievement and overall efficiency of higher education systems.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section explains the methodological approach used to assess the effects of the NEP 2020 on equity, access and quality in the higher education landscape in India. It refers to the research design, population, sampling, data sources, research instruments, variables, data collection process and statistical methods of data analysis.

3.1 Research Design and Research Approach

The study is conducted with quantitative descriptive research design with a deductive approach and aims to appraise the impact of the NEP 2020 on equity, access and quality in higher education in India. Primary data is gathered from various stakeholders of higher education institutions through a survey-based approach, which is then used to systematically analyze the perception of the stakeholders on the implementation of NEP 2020 and its impact on achieving its goals.

3.2 Population of the Study

The target customers include students, faculty and academic administrators from universities and college in India. These stakeholders can offer first-hand experience of the implementation of any educational policy and give valuable insights on the effects of NEP 2020.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling frame was employed for the selection of respondents with a total of 150 respondents. The sample included 100 students, 35 faculty members, and 15 academic administrators, representing the key groups in higher education.

In order to provide a balanced representation of these categories, the study used stratified random sampling technique. This helps to increase the reliability, accuracy and representativeness of the data by ensuring that the views of various parties are represented in the analysis.

3.4 Sources of Data

The study is based on primary and secondary data to provide a holistic analysis of the implications of NEP 2020 for equity, access and quality of higher education in India.

Primary Data

The primary data is gathered by conducting a structured questionnaire with students, faculty members and academic administrators. However, the focus of the questionnaire is on the perception of the respondents about the impact of NEP 2020 on equity, access and quality in the higher education system.

Secondary Data

The secondary data are gathered from other reliable sources like NEP 2020 document, reports of the Ministry of Education, publications of the University Grants Commission (UGC), reports on All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), scholarly research articles, journals, books, conference proceedings and other educational databases and government publications. The following are the various sources that give a broad understanding of the impact of NEP 2020 on higher education in India and an analysis of the same.

3.5 Research Instrument

A set of well-formulated questions is created according to the aims of the research. This questionnaire has two parts:

Section A: Demographic Information

This section gathers information regarding:

- Gender
- Age
- Educational Qualification
- Institutional Affiliation
- Role of Respondent (Student, Faculty Member, Administrator)

Section B: NEP 2020 Impact Assessment

The second section consists of statements measured on a five-point Likert scale:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree

- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly Agree

The statements are categorized into three dimensions:

- **Equity Dimension:** The equity dimension assesses how well NEP 2020 ensures equitable access to education for all learners, including disadvantaged and under-represented learners, while also fostering gender parity, removing geographical disparities in access to higher education, and enhancing financial support systems to lessen socio-economic barriers for accessing higher education.
- **Access Dimension:** The access dimension is related to the effectiveness of NEP 2020 in providing access to higher education through enrolment; accessibility of digital education; availability of online learning resources; expansion of educational institutions and enhanced flexibility in course selection that meets the needs and preferences of learners.
- **Quality Dimension:** The quality dimension evaluates how the implementation of NEP 2020 has contributed to strengthening the teaching quality in higher education as seen through various aspects namely: curriculum modernization, multidisciplinary learning, research and innovation, skills oriented to employability, and overall academic and career outcomes of students.

3.6 Variables of the Study and Data Collection Procedure

The study identifies the key variables to be used to look at the effect of NEP 2020 on higher education in India.

- **Independent Variable:** Implementing the NEP 2020 is the independent variable of this study, which is the main influencing factor for the changes and developments in the higher education system. The policy reforms, initiatives and strategic interventions and their effects on different facets of higher education in India are explored.
- **Dependent Variables:** Equity, access and quality in higher education are the dependent variables of the study. Equity means equity and inclusive education, access to higher education refers to availability and accessibility of the higher education resources and opportunities, and quality is the

enhancement in curriculum, teaching-learning processes, research, innovation, skill development, employability, and overall educational outcomes due to the implementation of NEP 2020.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process starts with preparing a structured questionnaire that is based on the intentions of the research and the literature search conducted on NEP 2020. To ensure the relevance, clarity and content validity of the questionnaire, it is reviewed and validated by subject experts.

Then the finalized questionnaire is sent to the selected respondents both online and offline. The responses collected are then checked for completeness and accuracy, coded and prepared for further statistical analysis. Respondents are encouraged to participate in the study voluntarily and their identity and responses are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity during the research process.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using SPSS.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** The statistical tools used to summarize and present the characteristics of the respondents and their responses in a meaningful way will be descriptive statistical techniques. The analysis will draw on frequency and percentage distributions to describe the participants' characteristics, and mean and standard deviation value for the question on the impact of NEP 2020 on equity, access and quality in higher education will be calculated to measure the central tendency and variability of the data.
- **Inferential Statistics:** In order to meet the objective of the research, the analysis of NEP 2020 impact on equity, access, and quality of higher education will be done using inferential statistical techniques. The following techniques will be used:
 - Mean Analysis
 - One-Sample t-Test
 - Pearson Correlation Analysis
 - Multiple Regression Analysis

- **Regression Model:** Multiple regression analysis will be used to evaluate the extent to which the parameters of equity, access and quality impact the overall perceived effect of NEP 2020 on higher education in India.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides an analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from 150 respondents which included students, academic administrators, faculty members in higher education institutions. The findings are presented based on the research purpose and focus which is to examine the effect of the NEP 2020 on equity and access and quality in higher education in India. Respondents' perceptions were analysed using statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, one sample t-tests, Pearson's correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis to determine the effectiveness of the policy in enacting its desired educational reforms.

A breakdown of the respondents by stakeholder category is provided in Table 1 to understand what sample was used for the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	100	66.7
Faculty Members	35	23.3
Academic Administrators	15	10.0
Total	150	100.0

As depicted in the table 1, the students were the largest group (66.7%) followed by the faculty members (23.3%) and academic administrators (10.0%). The distribution shows that it has included the views of the key actors of higher education. The increase in students' representation is justifiable as they are the primary beneficiaries of the reforms in NEP 2020.

The responses to the overall perception of the three aspects namely equity, access and quality of NEP 2020 were analysed using descriptive statistical measures and these are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Equity, Access, and Quality

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Equity	4.08	0.61
Access	4.15	0.58
Quality	4.22	0.55

The respondents on average showed a favorable perception of NEP 2020 with the mean responses of all the three dimensions were above 4.00 on the five-point Likert scale. The highest mean was obtained for quality (4.22), indicating that the respondents believe there is a significant improvement in educational quality. Access (4.15) and equity (4.08) were rated positively, though with some strength. The consistency of responses is reflected in the relatively small standard deviation values which suggest minimal variation within the sample in terms of perceptions.

A one sample t-test was done to test the first research objective on the effect of NEP 2020 on equity in higher education. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: One-Sample t-Test for Equity

Variable	Mean	t-value	p-value
Equity	4.08	21.34	0.000

The findings of table 3 show that the NEP 2020 has a statistically significant positive influence on equity for higher education ($t = 21.34$, $p < 0.001$). A mean score of 4.08 indicates that respondents agree that the policy has contributed to better educational opportunities for everyone, to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, to the increased efforts on gender equality and inclusion, and to better regional accessibility. Thus, the first research objective is fulfilled, which shows that NEP 2020 has made a positive impact in the field of equity in higher education.

To delve deeper into the equity dimension, the key initiatives undertaken in the field of higher education for equity under NEP 2020 are provided in Figure 1, with respondents' perspective on these initiatives.

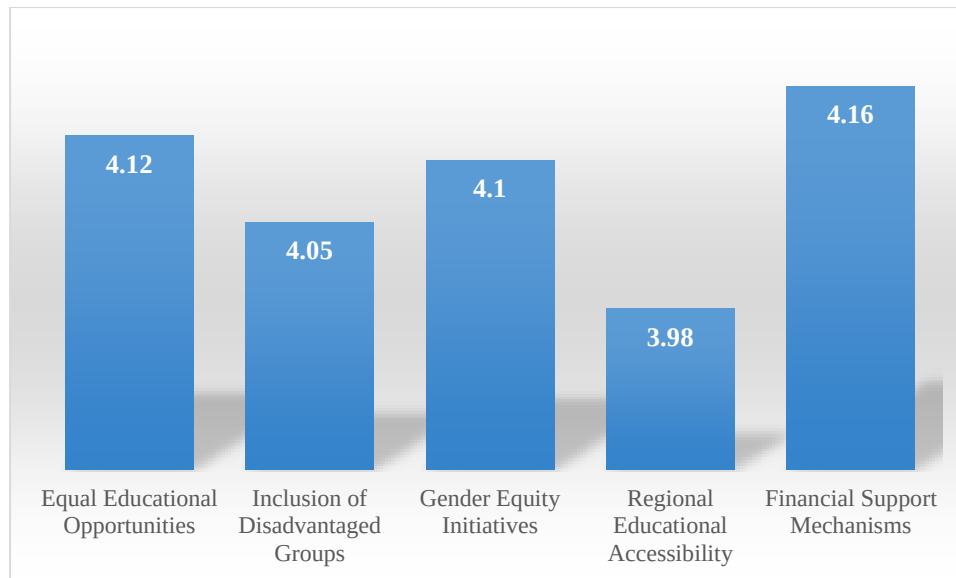


Figure 1: Respondents' Perceptions of Equity-Oriented Initiatives under NEP 2020

The figure 1 shows the perception of respondents on specific initiatives under the NEP 2020 pertaining to equity. Financial support mechanisms scored the highest (4.16), followed by equal educational opportunities (4.12) and gender equity initiatives (4.10). The score for regional educational accessibility was the lowest (3.98), which suggests that improvements have been made but there is still a need for further policy focus on this aspect.

Another one sample t-test was run to look into the effectiveness of NEP 2020 in enhancing access to higher education. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: One-Sample t-Test for Access

Variable	Mean	t-value	p-value
Access	4.15	24.72	0.000

The table 2 shows the statistically significant positive effect of NEP 2020 on accessing higher education ($t = 24.72$, $p < 0.001$). The mean value of 4.15 indicates high consensus among respondents on the improvement of enrollment opportunities, access to online education resources, availability of digital education tools, institutional growth and flexibility in course selection. The results of this study have been able to verify the improvement of access to higher education as a result of the policy as the second research objective.

To determine the impact of NEP 2020 on the quality of higher education a one sample t-test was conducted and the result is displayed in the table 5 below.

Table 5: One-Sample t-Test for Quality

Variable	Mean	t-value	p-value
Quality	4.22	27.15	0.000

Based on the findings of table 5, there is a highly significant positive impact of NEP 2020 on educational quality ($t = 27.15$, $p < 0.001$). The highest mean score of the dimensions (4.22) suggests that the participants believe that there are notable changes in terms of curricula modernization, multi-disciplinarity, research initiatives, innovations, skills development, and employment. This finding is consistent with the third research objective that quality enhancement is one of the most prominent impacts of NEP 2020.

In order to have further insights into the quality dimension, Figure 2 shows how the respondents evaluate the notable quality enhancement measures under NEP 2020.

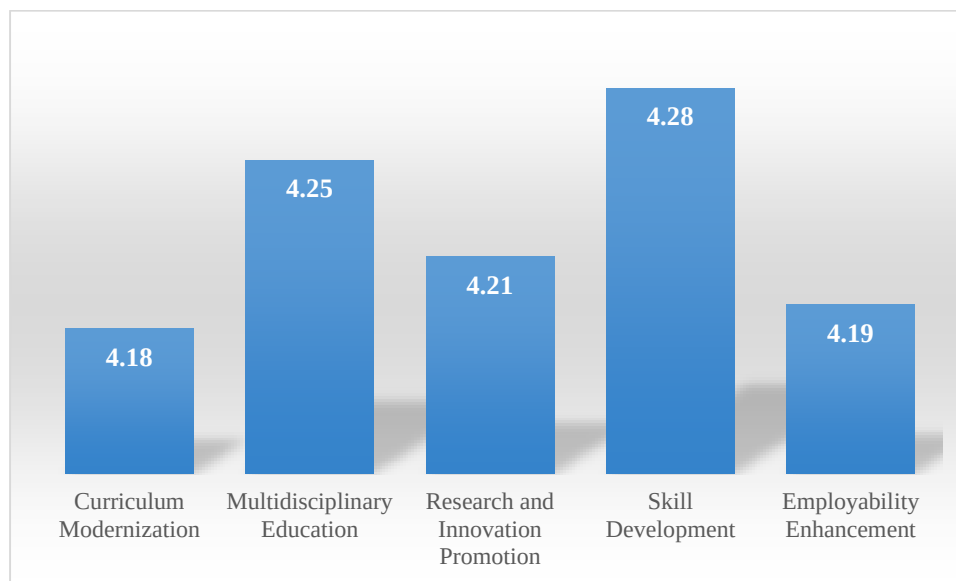


Figure 2: Perceived Contribution of NEP 2020 Quality Enhancement Measures

The above figure 2 illustrates how respondents rated their views about different quality improvement strategies under NEP 2020. The strategy that got the highest ranking (4.28) is skill development, followed by multidisciplinary education (4.25) and the promotion of research and innovation (4.21). Based on the

analysis, one can conclude that stakeholders view NEP 2020 as very effective in ensuring students acquire practical skills for the future.

In order to determine the connection among three main areas of higher education reforms under NEP 2020, a Pearson correlation analysis was carried out. The results are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlation among Equity, Access, and Quality

Variables	Equity	Access	Quality
Equity	1.000	0.671**	0.624**
Access	0.671**	1.000	0.718**
Quality	0.624**	0.718**	1.000

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The correlations obtained in table 6 show a very strong and positive relationship for all three variables. However, the most powerful relation has been shown by access and quality ($r=0.718$), which means that better accessibility leads to better quality in education. In a similar manner, equity has a positive relation with access ($r=0.671$) and quality ($r=0.624$). This indicates that equity, access, and quality are interrelated dimensions and play an important role in the success of NEP 2020.

In order to assess the impact of the dimensions of equity, access, and quality on the overall impact of NEP 2020 on higher education, a multiple regression test was conducted. Results of the regression are given in table 7.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis of Equity, Access, and Quality Influencing the Overall Impact of NEP 2020

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Equity	0.281	4.52	0.000
Access	0.336	5.18	0.000
Quality	0.401	6.27	0.000

The results of the regression model were statistically significant ($R = 0.812$, $R^2 = 0.659$, $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.652$, $F = 93.84$, $p < 0.001$), implying that the constructs of equity, access, and quality accounted for 65.9% of the variation in the overall perceived effects of NEP 2020. In terms of the determinants, quality proved to be the most influential factor in determining the policy's effectiveness ($\beta = 0.401$), while access and equity ranked second ($\beta = 0.336$) and third ($\beta = 0.281$), respectively. These variables had a statistically significant positive effect ($p < 0.001$) on the dependent variable.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the NEP-2020 has brought a positive change in higher education institutions concerning equity, access, and quality in India. The findings indicated that the stakeholders had overall positive perceptions on the effectiveness of the policy in addressing inclusive educational opportunities, expanding access by digital learning and institutional changes, improving educational quality through curriculum modernization, multidisciplinary learning, promotion of research and skill development. The positive linkages between equity, access, and quality also reinforced the inter-connectedness of higher education reforms as per NEP 2020. The overall impacts of the policy were fair to say that it was a great achievement in making the education system more inclusive, accessible, and quality higher education system to cater to the changing educational and socio-economic needs of the country.

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