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New Education Policy and India's Position in Global Education Rankings

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ABSTRACT

The New Education Policy of 2020 represents the most extensive educational reform in India since the previous educational reforms which occurred more than thirty years ago. The NEP 2020 education system which replaces the National Policy on Education of 1986 aims to develop students through multidisciplinary programs that teach practical skills which will enable India to become one of the world's leading knowledge-based economies. The QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings and PISA assessments together establish international standards which India has consistently failed to meet despite its demographic advantage of having one of the largest young populations in the world. The paper investigates the main elements of NEP 2020 while evaluating its ability to boost India's international educational status and assessing the obstacles that will prevent its complete execution. The authors of the paper assert that NEP 2020 offers an advanced policy framework but its power to create change will depend on continuous financial support and organizational changes and political determination from various government levels.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Education serves as the fundamental base which enables a nation to achieve economic development, build social unity, and compete with other countries at the international level. The educational system of a country determines both its capacity to innovate and its ability to achieve economic growth and develop its human resources according to current global standards. The stakes for education reform in India reach their maximum point because the country serves as home to 1.4 billion people and has a median age of 28 years while it possesses the largest youth demographic across the planet. The educational system in India ranks among the largest worldwide based on its extensive size. The system covers 1.5 million schools and 50,000 higher education institutions while serving 320 million students who study at different educational levels. The educational system has not achieved high standards despite its enormous size. The Indian education system has consistently failed to meet its educational benchmarks because its performance on global assessment tests and assessment tests and university rankings falls below its desired goals and required economic earning capacity. The QS World University Rankings 2024 list only three Indian institutions among the top 200 universities.

The UN Human Development Index Education Index ranks India at a low level because the country shows significant educational deficiencies and produces insufficient research output while educational opportunities remain unavailable to all citizens.

The Government of India introduced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in July 2020 as its first major educational reform since 1986. The policy creates an ambitious goal which aims to establish India as a global knowledge superpower by 2040 to raise the Gross Enrollment Ratio GER in higher education to 50 by 2035 and to achieve at least 10 Indian universities ranking among the top 100 global universities within the next decade. The research paper studies NEP 2020 to determine its key features and their effects on educational quality and international competitiveness while evaluating India's current status in major global educational rankings and studying the advantages and difficulties which India faces for its educational improvement through NEP implementation.

2. OVERVIEW OF NEP 2020: KEY PROVISIONS AND VISION

1.1 Structural Reforms: The 5+3+3+4 Model

The NEP 2020 restructuring process begins with its fundamental structural component which establishes a complete educational structure that replaces traditional 10+2 school systems through its implementation of the 5+3+3+4 educational system. The new educational framework establishes developmental age-appropriate learning requirements which continue from early childhood until the end of secondary education. The educational framework establishes formal educational pathways for early childhood care and education (ECCE) which begin operational capacity to the educational system through which children acquire their essential cognitive abilities during their initial learning period. The structural transformation process enables Indian educational institutions to implement international educational standards while adopting the educational practices of Finland, Singapore, and South Korea which maintain their positions as leading global educational systems.

2.2 Multilingualism and Mother Tongue Instruction

NEP 2020 mandates that the medium of instruction up to at least Grade 5 — and preferably Grade 8 — should be the mother tongue, home language, or regional language. The provision exists because research evidence from cognitive science and educational studies shows that children learn best when they use their first language for learning. India supports multilingual education which has demonstrated better basic literacy and numeracy results through its adoption of proven educational practices.

2.3 Higher Education: Flexibility and Multidisciplinarity

NEP 2020 implements fundamental educational reforms to higher education because it wants to replace India's traditional university structure, which uses separate academic fields, with a new system that permits multiple disciplines. The main features of the program introduce a four-year undergraduate degree system which lets students begin and end their studies at different times, thus providing them with various types of educational credentials. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) enables students to accumulate and transfer credits across institutions, which supports their lifelong learning journey and academic mobility.

The policy establishes a plan to eliminate affiliated colleges because they receive criticism for weakening academic quality which will be replaced by autonomous degree-granting colleges and research universities. The plan requires Peter Pritchett's Multidisciplinary Education and Research University system to create Indian educational institutions which will compete globally at top academic research centers.

2.4 Research and Innovation: The National Research Foundation

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes the National Research Foundation government agency to address India's research output and quality problems which currently exist because Indian research efforts do not match global standards. The National Research Foundation functions as a funding organization which supports research development throughout various fields of study while it provides guidance to researchers. The National Research Foundation will help India improve its research funding system while increasing the quality of research output from Indian universities. The National Research Foundation will solve the critical investment problem which exists because India spends 0.65 percent of its GDP on research and development instead of the 2 to 4 percent range which advanced knowledge economies maintain.

2.5 Digital Education and Technology Integration

NEP 2020 gives prominent attention to digital education, envisioning a technology-enabled education system which can provide high-quality learning throughout all of India's extensive and varied natural landscapes. The National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) serves as a platform which helps educational institutions share their knowledge about technology usage in teaching practices. The organizations DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing), SWAYAM (online courses platform), and PM eVIDYA program serve as the main channels through which digital educational materials will be distributed. The COVID-19 pandemic which began together with the policy announcement created an urgent need for digital development which became essential to the country's progress.

2.6 Equity and Inclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes educational equity as its main goal which aims to provide educational opportunities for all students who have been historically marginalized including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes and girls and children with disabilities and children who live in remote areas. The policy proposes Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and communities, a Gender Inclusion Fund, and targeted interventions to reduce dropout rates and improve learning outcomes among vulnerable populations.

3. INDIA'S CURRENT POSITION IN GLOBAL EDUCATION RANKINGS

3.1 QS World University Rankings

The QS World University Rankings function as essential worldwide standards that assess the educational standards of universities throughout the world. The QS 2024 rankings showed Indian universities making substantial progress because IIT Bombay achieved a rank of 118th and IIT Delhi reached 150th rank and IIT Madras obtained 227th rank which all represented better results than their past performance. More than 45 Indian institutions now appear among the top 1000 universities which demonstrates that research output and international standing of Indian institutions have progressed throughout the country. The QS metrics for India show major deficiencies because they include Academic Reputation and Employer Reputation and Citations per Faculty and International Faculty Ratio and International Student Ratio. Employers recognize Indian graduates especially in engineering and management fields which leads to Indian universities receiving high Employer Reputation scores) yet their research output and internationalization efforts face challenges because of their low Citations per Faculty and International Faculty/Student ratios.

3.2 Times Higher Education (THE) Rankings

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore achieved global top 250 status in THE World University Rankings 2024 through its outstanding research achievements and citation performance. The number of Indian institutions in the THE top 1000 has grown steadily since recent editions, reaching over 90 institutions today. Indian institutions show weak performance in Teaching (learning environment) and International Outlook and Industry Income metrics.

3.3 PISA and Learning Outcomes

India has taken part in the PISA assessment which the OECD uses as its most reliable international standard to measure student academic achievement in schools. India participated in PISA 2009, when students from Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were tested, and ranked 72nd and 73rd (out of 74 participating countries) in reading and mathematics respectively — a deeply concerning result that prompted the government to withdraw from subsequent PISA cycles. India announced its return to PISA 2022 (subsequently delayed to 2025), signaling renewed confidence in its school improvement trajectory.

3.4 National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)

The National Institutional Ranking Framework, which India established in 2015, has developed its credibility and public participation since its initial establishment. The NIRF rankings function as valuable domestic assessment instruments which institutions use to evaluate their research output and graduation results and their community engagement activities although they do not provide direct links to international ranking systems.

4. NEP 2020 AND ITS POTENTIAL IMPACT ON GLOBAL RANKINGS

4.1 Research Output and Quality

Global university rankings evaluate research outputs and citation impacts with considerable importance. The National Research Foundation proposed by NEP 2020 will enhance India's research output if the foundation receives sufficient funding and the government implements its plans effectively. Countries that have made rapid ascents in global rankings — such as China and South Korea — did so primarily by dramatically increasing their research investment and output. The Chinese government has spent two decades establishing a research funding system that attracts talented researchers which results in their improved performance in QS and THE rankings.

India currently produces approximately 3–4% of the world's research output by volume but its citation impact which measures research quality and influence remains below the global average in many fields. India needs to improve its research quality and international collaboration and knowledge transfer capabilities to achieve its goal of placing 10 universities in the global top 100.

4.2 Internationalization

Indian institutions receive low scores on QS rankings because international faculty and student ratios serve as essential ranking criteria. The NEP 2020 framework obligates Indian higher education institutions to develop international programs through its requirement that top foreign universities must establish campuses in India while Indian universities must create international branches. The first international university campuses in GIFT City, Gujarat, which UK and Australian institutions established, represent an early positive step towards international education expansion.

India needs to make two types of improvements to attract international students and faculty which include making policy changes and developing better campus facilities and living standards and establishing open academic environments that require continuous work after implementing policies.

4.3 Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) and Access

NEP 2020 targets an increase in the GER in higher education from approximately 26.3% (2019–20) to 50% by 2035. The target requires India to reach 50% higher education enrollment which would establish educational access at the same level as worldwide standards while providing additional skilled workers for research activities. The combination of improved GER and better educational standards will enhance India's global academic reputation which will result in better international ranking performance and greater employment success for graduates.

4.4 Curriculum and Pedagogical Reforms

Indian higher education systems have improved their academic standards through three educational changes which include multidisciplinary education and outcome-based learning and competency-based assessment systems. The new curriculum requirements which include critical thinking and creativity and problem-solving skills as essential learning goals will replace traditional memorization methods to enhance student learning outcomes and develop graduates who are suitable for work in the knowledge economy.

4.5 School Education and PISA Readiness

The foundational literacy and numeracy mission of NEP 2020 will bring India better PISA results when it successfully enters the assessment system. The policy needs to focus on mother-tongue teaching methods and play-based learning programs for early education and competency-based advancement systems because these elements address the main reasons why India performs poorly on PISA assessments. The National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat) launched in 2021 as an NEP-based program which aims to develop basic educational skills that students need to reach by Grade 3.

5. CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Implementation Gap

The most serious problem which NEP 2020 faces exists not in its highly regarded vision but in its actual implementation. The historical record of India shows how ambitious education policies have failed to achieve their intended outcomes since the country established its educational system. The distance between policy formulations and actual conditions on the ground reaches its highest point within a nation which possesses India's vastness and diverse population together with its complex institutional framework. The central government together with 28 state governments and thousands of local entities must work together to implement NEP 2020. States in India possess substantial power to manage their educational systems because education functions as a concurrent subject under the Indian Constitution. The implementation of NEP 2020 across the country faces challenges because multiple states have delayed their policy and budget alignment with NEP 2020 requirements.

5.2 Financing the Reform

The National Education Policy 2020 directs that educational funding should reach 6 percent of gross domestic product which has remained unattained since the Kothari Commission report established it as an official goal in 1966.India currently spends approximately 2.9-3.1% of GDP on education which constitutes less than half of the NEP educational expenditure recommendation. The policy's most important educational elements which include the National Research Foundation and Early Childhood Care and Education expansion and infrastructure development for multidisciplinary universities and teacher training system reform require major funding increases to enable their proper implementation.

5.3 Teacher Quality and Training

The NEP 2020 document provides an accurate identification of teacher quality as the fundamental element which builds the entire education system. The current status of teacher education throughout India continues to present serious challenges. A significant proportion of teacher education institutions have been found to be of substandard quality. The NEP implementation requires educational institutions to establish a continuous professional development framework together with a four-year integrated teacher education program as part of their teacher education system transformation process which represents a highly intricate and extensive undertaking.

5.4 Digital Divide

The NEP 2020 programs require complete digital infrastructure together with full device accessibility across all regions of India but these requirements remain unmet throughout the country. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that many students who lived in rural and semi-urban areas did not have proper internet access together with the necessary equipment for online education. The ASER 2022 report discovered that rural households now have better smartphone availability but their digital learning capabilities still show significant disparities. The digital divide needs to be solved because digital education programs will create more educational inequality instead of solving the problem.

5.5 Language Policy Tensions

The educational system demonstrates effective educational value through its mother-tongue instruction program, but this program has sparked political disputes across various states in India. The implementation of national basic literacy standards requires schools to resolve their existing language policy disputes, which presents educational institutions with a continuous and intricate challenge.

5.6 Ranking Metrics vs. Educational Quality

The academic relationship between global rankings and actual educational standards needs to be evaluated through critical analysis. The current structure of global university rankings emphasizes research output and citation impact and internationalization metrics which specifically benefit large research-intensive universities located in English-speaking countries that receive substantial funding per student. The QS metrics will evaluate an Indian teaching-focused college that produces excellent graduates and serves its community well as a low-performing institution because it provides high-quality educational services. Policymakers together with academic leaders should avoid letting ranking metrics control their institutional missions while they should preserve their resources for undergraduate teaching vocational education and community engagement which fulfill the primary objectives of NEP 2020 but current ranking systems do not effectively measure.

6. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: LESSONS FROM CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

India's global education ranking progress depends on studying how other countries achieved success through their educational reforms and their financial investments in education. The universities of China underwent their most significant changes when their national research programs developed Project 985 and Project 211 during the 1990s and used its funding to improve particular universities for better research performance. The QS rankings for 2024 show Peking University at 17th position and Tsinghua University at 25th position because both universities achieved this status through their dual approach of research funding and talent acquisition and international outreach which they implemented over the past twenty years. South Korea achieved its current status as an educational leader through its dedication to education which involves sustaining public spending at over 5 percent of GDP and backing STEM research and maintaining a societal commitment to academic success. South Korea achieves its top position in educational performance through its continuous improvement of PISA assessment results which place the country among the highest scoring nations in the world. The Indian government needs to make extended financial commitments to educational institutions which require permanent institutional support for their academic goals. The implementation of effective policies requires organizations to follow established procedures. The required solution consists of a reform initiative that will proceed for multiple decades with sufficient funding and complete assessment throughout its duration.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes itself as an institutional landmark document which studies educational development throughout Indian history. The policy presents an educated plan which uses research evidence to create ambitious goals that will modernize India's educational system for the upcoming century. The framework requires complete application of its various elements which range from early childhood education to school reform and higher education redesign and research development and digital learning implementation and equity initiatives to achieve actual improvements in educational results and international reputation for India.

India shows positive progress towards better global education rankings at this moment. The upward trend shows itself through better QS and THE rankings of India's top institutions and NIRF which now includes more institutions and Indian research output which continues to grow. The National Education Policy 2020 will lead to a major improvement in this particular educational pathway. The process of transforming potential into actual outcomes needs several essential requirements to be fulfilled.

The education system needs more financial resources which should reach 6 percent of GDP according to national education policy NEP. The system needs strict enforcement of its provisions which should include both monitoring and assessment procedures. The national NEP implementation monitoring framework needs to establish specific milestones while creating responsibility systems and methods for adjusting course. The foundation of education reform depends on teacher quality which needs to be treated as the main element. The following elements must be established before authentic learning outcomes can be achieved. The digital infrastructure gap needs elimination because it affects both educational equity and operational efficiency. Universal affordable broadband connectivity and device access for students who live in rural and underserved areas must be recognized as essential educational infrastructure. India needs to rejoin PISA and actively participate in international education assessments which serve as diagnostic tools because the data will help achieve evidence-based progress in basic learning skills. The core essentials need to be maintained through persistent dedication which will enable NEP 2020 to establish India as a top international educational system beyond mere ranking assessments. The educational system will provide quality learning opportunities to every Indian child and young person when NEP 2020 develops into a national foundation for educational advancement. Education serves as the fundamental base which enables a nation to achieve economic development, build social unity, and compete with other countries at the international level. The educational system of a country determines both its capacity to innovate and its ability to achieve economic growth and develop its human resources according to current global standards. The stakes for education reform in India reach their maximum point because the country serves as home to 1.4 billion people and has a median age of 28 years while it possesses the largest youth demographic across the planet. The educational system in India ranks among the largest worldwide based on its extensive size. The system covers 1.5 million schools and 50,000 higher education institutions while serving 320 million students who study at different educational levels. The educational system has not achieved high standards despite its enormous size. The Indian education system has consistently failed to meet its educational benchmarks because its performance on global assessment tests and assessment tests and university rankings falls below its desired goals and required economic earning capacity. The QS World University Rankings 2024 list only three Indian institutions among the top 200 universities. The UN Human Development Index Education Index ranks India at a low level because the country shows significant educational deficiencies and produces insufficient research output while educational opportunities remain unavailable to all citizens.

The Government of India introduced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in July 2020 as its first major educational reform since 1986. The policy creates an ambitious goal which aims to establish India as a global knowledge superpower by 2040 to raise the Gross Enrollment Ratio GER in higher education to 50 by 2035 and to achieve at least 10 Indian universities ranking among the top 100 global universities within the next decade. The research paper studies NEP 2020 to determine its key features and their effects on educational quality and international competitiveness while evaluating India's current status in major global educational rankings and studying the advantages and difficulties which India faces for its educational improvement through NEP implementation.

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The NEP 2020 programs require complete digital infrastructure together with full device accessibility across all regions of India but these requirements remain unmet throughout the country. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that many students who lived in rural and semi-urban areas did not have proper internet access together with the necessary equipment for online education. The ASER 2022 report discovered that rural households now have better smartphone

availability but their digital learning capabilities still show significant disparities. The digital divide needs to be solved because digital education programs will create more educational inequality instead of solving the problem.

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The academic relationship between global rankings and actual educational standards needs to be evaluated through critical analysis. The current structure of global university rankings emphasizes research output and citation impact and internationalization metrics which specifically benefit large research-intensive universities located in English-speaking countries that receive substantial funding per student. The QS metrics will evaluate an Indian teaching-focused college that produces excellent graduates and serves its community well as a low-performing institution because it provides high-quality educational services. Policymakers together with academic leaders should avoid letting ranking metrics control their institutional missions while they should preserve their resources for undergraduate teaching vocational education and community engagement which fulfill the primary objectives of NEP 2020 but current ranking systems do not effectively measure.

6. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: LESSONS FROM CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

India's global education ranking progress depends on studying how other countries achieved success through their educational reforms and their financial investments in education. The universities of China underwent their most significant changes when their national research programs developed Project 985 and Project 211 during the 1990s and used its funding to improve particular universities for better research performance. The QS rankings for 2024 show Peking University at 17th position and Tsinghua University at 25th position because both universities achieved this status through their dual approach of research funding and talent acquisition and international outreach which they implemented over the past twenty years. South Korea achieved its current status as an educational leader through its dedication to education which involves sustaining public spending at over 5 percent of GDP and backing STEM research and maintaining a societal commitment to academic success. South Korea achieves its top position in educational performance through its continuous improvement of PISA assessment results which place the country among the highest scoring nations in the world. The Indian government needs to make extended financial commitments to educational institutions which require permanent institutional support for their academic goals. The implementation of effective policies requires organizations to follow established procedures. The required solution consists of a reform initiative that will proceed for multiple decades with sufficient funding and complete assessment throughout its duration.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes itself as an institutional landmark document which studies educational development throughout Indian history. The policy presents an educated plan which uses research evidence to create ambitious goals that will modernize India's educational system for the upcoming century. The framework requires complete application of its various elements which range from early childhood education to school reform and higher education redesign and research development and digital learning implementation and equity initiatives to achieve actual improvements in educational results and international reputation for India.

India shows positive progress towards better global education rankings at this moment. The upward trend shows itself through better QS and THE rankings of India's top institutions and NIRF which now includes more institutions and Indian research output which continues to grow. The National Education Policy 2020 will lead to a major improvement in this particular educational pathway. The process of transforming potential into actual outcomes needs several essential requirements to be fulfilled.

The education system needs more financial resources which should reach 6 percent of GDP according to national education policy NEP. The system needs strict enforcement of its provisions which should include both monitoring and assessment procedures. The national NEP implementation monitoring framework needs to establish specific milestones while creating responsibility systems and methods for adjusting course. The foundation of education reform depends on teacher quality which needs to be treated as the main element. The following elements must be established before authentic learning outcomes can be achieved. The digital infrastructure gap needs elimination because it affects both educational equity and operational efficiency. Universal affordable broadband connectivity and device access for students who live in rural and underserved areas must be recognized as essential educational infrastructure. India needs to rejoin PISA and actively participate in international education assessments which serve as diagnostic tools because the data will help achieve evidence-based progress in basic learning skills. The core essentials need to be maintained through persistent dedication which will enable NEP 2020 to establish India as a top international educational system beyond mere ranking assessments. The educational system will provide quality learning opportunities to every Indian child and young person when NEP 2020 develops into a national foundation for educational advancement.

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