

Discussion on National Education Policy (NEP 2020) & Comparison with Right of Children to compulsory and free Education Act (RTE 2009)

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ABSTRACT

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, and the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, are two significant reforms in India's education sector. This paper explores their impact, similarities, and differences while examining how they shape the future of education. Both policies emphasize access, equity, quality, and holistic development, but their scope and implementation differ. The study aims to analyze their roles in transforming the Indian education system and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

Keywords: *Right to Education Act, National Education Policy, education reform, equity, quality education*

1. Introduction

Education has long been a priority in India, with various policies aimed at improving access and equity. The National Policy on Education (1986, modified in 1992) set the foundation for educational reforms but remained incomplete. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, provided a legal framework for equitable education. The most recent reform, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, envisions a holistic transformation of the education system. This paper explores these policies in the context of India's evolving educational needs and global trends.

2. SDGs and Education – NEP 2020

The sustainable development goals (SDG) by 2030, which are accepted by all UN member nations also focuses on Quality Education as SDG – 4. It seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. This goal requires an overhaul of the education system. And thus, it becomes the background for developing a new education policy. The need of NEP also lies into the changing global environment where there is increasing need of skills in the field of data science, computers, healthcare, engineering who can contribute in managing pandemics, work for the space programs, handle digital threats, use data as a resource and work towards making this world a better place. With India moving towards being a developed country the focus on arts and humanities has also increased. Also required is the cross functional and multi-dimensional knowledge and skills. The employment landscape

is also changing along with the global requirements. This requires a major change in the way the youth are gaining knowledge. One of the key factors of NEP is that it wants children not just to learn but to learn how to learn. Knowledge is infinite and the coming generations should not limit themselves to that which is taught in the schools and colleges. For all this to succeed what is important is the foundation of schooling and education. NEP focuses on it and has recommended the structure of school education to be like 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3 to 18 years.

3. Similarities between NEP and RTE

Though the National Education Policy (NEP) and the Right to Education (RTE) Act have distinct objectives, there are several similarities in their underlying philosophy and approach to education in India.

1. Focus on Universal Access to Education: While NEP aims for universal access to education at all levels, from early childhood to higher education, ensuring that no child is left behind, RTE also guarantees universal access to free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years, ensuring every child is enrolled and attends school. In this way they both prioritize access to education for all, particularly focusing on inclusive education to bridge socio-economic gaps.

2. Commitment to Equity and Inclusivity: NEP emphasizes equity by aiming to reduce dropout rates and promoting education for marginalized and underrepresented

communities, including SCs, STs, and economically disadvantaged groups and RTE mandates inclusion through the reservation of 25% of seats in private schools for economically weaker sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups. Both frameworks work toward equitable access to education, aiming to eliminate disparities based on gender, socio-economic status, and geography.

3. Child-Centric Approach: The focus of NEP is on a child-centric, holistic approach to learning, aiming to develop cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical skills in children and RTE also ensures that children’s well-being is prioritized in schools by prohibiting physical punishment, mental harassment, and ensuring a child-friendly environment. They both adopt a child-centric philosophy, prioritizing the overall development and well-being of students, and fostering environments that are conducive to learning.

4. Quality of Education: NEP advocates for improving the quality of education through modern teaching methods, teacher training, technology integration, and curriculum reforms and RTE has also set specific norms for the quality of education, such as minimum teacher qualifications, teacher-student ratios, and school infrastructure requirements to ensure effective learning environments. Thus, the importance of improving the quality of education, recognizing that access to education must be accompanied by a focus on learning outcomes is stressed in both.

5. Focus on Early Childhood Education: The newer system proposed by NEP introduces Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a fundamental stage in the 5+3+3+4 educational structure, covering children aged 3-8 years and the RTE Amendment (2019) extended the RTE framework to include pre-primary education for children aged 3-6 years. The importance of early childhood education in laying the foundation for lifelong learning, cognitive development and school readiness is give due importance in both.

6. Teacher Training and Development: NEP Highlights the need for teacher training, continuous professional development, and improving teacher quality through better recruitment, accountability, and empowerment and RTE has set minimum qualifications for teachers and mandates professional training, aiming to improve teaching quality in elementary schools. Both emphasize the crucial role of teachers in shaping the quality of education and call for measures to improve teacher training, capacity-building, and professional development.

7. Assessment and Evaluation Reforms: Reforms in assessment are proposed in NEP like, shifting from rote learning to a more holistic assessment of skills, critical thinking, and conceptual understanding. At the same time RTE prohibits holding back students in the same grade (no-detention policy) and emphasizes the importance of continuous comprehensive evaluation to assess and improve student learning. Thus, the

reforms to move away from traditional assessments and work towards progressive and comprehensive evaluation systems is included in both.

8. Emphasis on Infrastructure and Learning Environment: NEP Stresses the importance of adequate school infrastructure for effective learning, proposing upgrades in school facilities, libraries, digital classrooms, and other resources and RTE has laid down minimum infrastructure standards (such as classroom sizes, playgrounds, drinking water facilities) to ensure a conducive learning environment. Both recognize that the learning environment and infrastructure play a key role in the quality of education and student engagement, pushing for improved school conditions.

4. Key Differences

| Aspect | Right to Education (RTE) | National Education Policy (NEP) |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Scope | Focuses on elementary education (ages 6-14). | Covers the entire education system from early childhood to higher education. |
| Legal Framework | Enforceable legal act under Article 21A. | Policy document guiding reforms, not legally binding. |
| Implementation | Immediate and enforceable rights to education. | Provides long-term strategic direction for education reforms. |
| Focus Area | Ensuring free and compulsory education. | Emphasizing holistic education, skill development, and interdisciplinary learning. |

5. Conclusion

To conclude we can say that both NEP and RTE are committed to transforming India’s education system by ensuring universal access, equity, inclusivity, and quality. While NEP has a broader scope covering all levels of education and more progressive, long-term reforms, RTE enforces the right to elementary education as a fundamental right, with a focus on immediate legal obligations. Despite these differences, both frameworks share common goals of improving education for all children and ensuring that no child is left behind.

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