



INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL POLICIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Educational policies in India have undergone significant changes since its independence. These policies aimed to address diverse challenges and provide educational facilities to all sections of society, meeting the demand for a skilled workforce in response to economic developments over time. The paper examines the various educational policy measures in India since independence, highlighting continuity, changes, and the roles of both central and state governments. It explores key policies such as the 'Education Commission, 1964-66, the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968, the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986, India's RTE Act (2009), and the NEP 2020, emphasizing their impact on accessibility, educational equity, and quality. The analysis underscores the importance of periodic revisions in educational policies to adapt to evolving socio-economic realities and meet the diverse needs of the population. The collaborative framework between central and state governments, guided by constitutional provisions, ensures a balanced approach to educational policymaking. Moving forward, sustained efforts and cooperative approaches will be crucial to building a robust education system that empowers individuals and fosters national development. Through this analysis, we can gain insights into the historical trajectory of Indian education policies and their implications affecting the ongoing and future development of the country's education system.

Keywords: India, educational policies, continuity, changes, central government, state government.

Introduction

India, since its independence in 1947, has made significant strides in its educational landscape, driven by a series of policies aimed at expanding access, promoting equity, and enhancing quality across all levels of education. These policies have played an important role in addressing diverse challenges faced by the education system, aligning with the socio-economic conditions of the country. From the early emphasis on achieving universal elementary education to the recent reforms aimed at transforming the entire education ecosystem, Indian educational policies were aimed at meeting the changing needs of its vast and diverse population.

Post-independence, India inherited a fragmented and unequal education system marked by low literacy rates, limited access to schooling, and stark disparities across regions and communities. Recognizing education as a fundamental tool for socio-economic development and nation-building, successive governments have formulated and implemented various policies to address these challenges and foster inclusive growth.



Significance of Educational policies in India since independence

Educational policies in India since independence have been pivotal in shaping the trajectory of the education system, addressing multifaceted challenges, and fostering inclusive growth. The 1986 National Policy on Education marked a significant step toward broadening educational access, with a focus on universalizing elementary education. It underscored the state's responsibility to ensure that every child is provided with the opportunity to attend school, thereby laying the groundwork for inclusive educational development (Ministry of Education, 1986). The enactment of the 'Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009' marked a pivotal shift toward ensuring educational equity and social inclusion, by enshrining the right to free and compulsory education in law, applicable to children within the 6-14 age group. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009)'.

Educational policies have consistently aimed at improving the levels of educational excellence throughout all stages of learning. Schemes like SSA were introduced to enhance the standard of elementary education, by strengthening educational infrastructure, appointing qualified teachers, and supplying essential learning resources, thereby ensuring an environment supportive of effective learning (Ministry of Education, 2001). Recognizing the critical role of skill development in enhancing employability, the National Skills Qualifications Framework (2013) aimed to align education and vocational training with industry-relevant skills (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2013).

Contemporary policy reforms, like the 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020', have emphasized promoting innovation, creativity, and critical thinking among students. This policy advocates for multidisciplinary education and flexibility in the curriculum to foster holistic development, thereby preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century (Ministry of Education, 2020). Technology's pivotal role in education policy initiatives has emphasized its integration into teaching and learning, promoting digital and online platforms to broaden access and engagement (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Important Educational Policies in India Since Independence

Since independence, the educational sector in India has seen a number of reformative policies designed to tackle systemic challenges and promote inclusive and equitable development. 'The National Policy on Education (NPE)' of 1968 marked a significant step towards addressing the educational needs of the newly independent nation (Ministry of Education, 1968). However, it was the NPE of 1986 and its subsequent modifications in 1992 that laid the foundation for comprehensive educational reforms. The policy emphasized the need for 'universal elementary education (UEE)', equitable access, and quality improvement across all levels of education (Ministry of Education, 1986). It introduced programs like the 'District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) designed to improve primary education in underserved regions. Subsequently, the introduction of non-formal education and adult literacy programs aimed to address the educational requirements of marginalized sections while improving access to lifelong learning. (Ministry of Education, 1992).

'The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009' represented a significant legislative milestone by making free and compulsory education a constitutional right for children between six and



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fourteen years old. (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). The RTE Act mandated free and compulsory education, thereby addressing disparities in access and ensuring inclusivity. It further prescribed specific norms and standards related to infrastructure, pupil-teacher ratios, and educational quality, aiming to enhance learning outcomes across schools. With its launch in 2001, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan set out to accomplish universal elementary education through the provision of adequate infrastructure, professionally trained teachers, and essential learning resources (Ministry of Education, 2001). SSA played a crucial role in bridging gaps in access and quality, notably in rural and far-flung areas.

In recent years, educational priorities have increasingly emphasized skill development and vocational training to meet the evolving demands of a developing economy. ‘The National Skill Development Policy (NSDP) of 2009’ stressed the importance of developing a competent workforce equipped to address the challenges posed by globalization and rapid technological progress (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2009). The policy aimed at enhancing employability through skill training programs and promoting entrepreneurship among youth. The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in 2013 provided a unified framework for skill development and certification, ensuring standardization and recognition of skills across sectors (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2013).

The 2020 New Education Policy marks abroad-based educational reform addressing the needs of the 21st century and aligning with global best practices (Ministry of Education, 2020). The NEP advocates for a well-rounded education approach, emphasizing flexibility and integration across disciplines. It underscores the significance of early childhood care and education, along with basic literacy and numeracy competencies, as essential components for building a robust educational foundation. The policy also emphasizes the integration of educational technology, technological ability, and online education systems to boost access and quality of education. The NEP also seeks to revamp teacher education and professional development to improve teaching standards and enhance learning outcomes.

It further highlights the promotion of exploration and development within the education sector as a means to cultivate creativity, logical thinking, and the ability to resolve. It proposes setting up research institutions, promoting interdisciplinary research, and establishing a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to facilitate innovation and collaboration within the field of education. Additionally, the framework advocates for promoting regional languages and multilingualism to ensure better understanding and retention of concepts among students.

Educational Policy	Important Features
‘Education Commission (1964-66)’	Promoted common school structure, emphasized teaching science and mathematics subjects, promoted three-language policy, focused on vocational education, and also suggested university reforms, among other recommendations
‘National Policy on Education (NPE), 1968’	Promoted a common educational structure and fostered national integration.



‘National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986’	Emphasized universal elementary education (UEE) and equitable access to quality education. Introduced innovative programs like the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and alternative education.
‘Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009’	Recognized education as a fundamental right for 6 to 14-year-old children, enforcing free and compulsory schooling to reduce access gaps.
‘National Skill Development Policy (NSDP), 2009’	Emphasized creating a skilled workforce to meet the challenges of globalization and technological advancement.
‘National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), 2013’	Provided a unified framework for skill development and certification, ensuring standardization and recognition of skills across sectors.
‘New Education Policy (NEP), 2020’	Advocated for holistic development, flexibility, and multidisciplinary learning. - Emphasises early childhood care, integration of technology, and research and innovation in education.

Since its independence, educational policies in India have evolved to address the diverse needs of the society and the changing socio-economic realities. From the focus on access and equity in the early years to the emphasis on skill development and innovation in recent times, these policies have significantly influenced the formation of the education landscape of the country. To implement these policies effectively, coordinated collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector is essential to guarantee that every child has access to quality education and the opportunity to realize their full potential.

Need for Periodic Revisions in Educational Policies

Revising and revisiting educational policies in India since independence has been imperative due to various reasons, reflecting the evolving socio-economic landscape and changing educational needs of the population. Firstly, India’s vast diversity is reflected in the varied educational needs of its regions, communities, and socio-economic groups. Educational policies need to be revisited periodically to address these diverse needs and ensure inclusivity and equity in access to education (Kothari Commission, 1966). Additionally, rapid advancements in technology and globalization have transformed the skills required in the job market. Reforming educational policies facilitates the alignment of curricula with contemporary labor market requirements, thereby equipping students with the skills necessary for both employment and entrepreneurial pursuits (National Policy on Education, 1986). Societal changes such as urbanization, migration, and changing family structures have implications for education. Revisiting policies allows for the incorporation of provisions to address emerging challenges such as migrant education, gender equality, and the needs of marginalized communities (NEP-1986).



Frequent revisions of educational policies are necessary to boost the quality of education and learning results. Evaluating existing policies may reveal gaps in infrastructure, teaching methodologies, and learning materials, necessitating reforms to enhance the quality of education delivery (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2001). Revisiting policies enables the adoption of innovative pedagogies and teaching techniques to cater to diverse learning styles and preferences (New Education Policy, 2020). Changes in educational governance structures and administrative processes may warrant revisions to ensure effective implementation and accountability (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). Moreover, international standards and best practices serve as benchmarks for educational excellence. Revisiting policies allows for benchmarking against global standards and incorporating international best practices to enhance the quality and relevance of education in India (NEP, 2020).

Societal aspirations coupled with expectations from schooling have evolved. Revising policies provides an opportunity to incorporate values such as inclusivity, sustainability, and ethical citizenship in the education system (New Education Policy, 2020). These policies play a crucial role in fostering national development and promoting social cohesion. Revising policies allows for the alignment of educational objectives with national development goals such as poverty alleviation, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (National Policy on Education, 1986). Additionally, revisiting policies facilitates the involvement of stakeholders such as educators, parents, students, and civil society organizations in the policymaking process, ensuring that policies reflect the aspirations and concerns of all stakeholders (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). It is important to address diverse educational needs and align the curriculum with changing job market demands, individual empowerment, and national progress.

Continuity and changes in educational policies in India

Continuity and changes in Indian educational policies since independence reflect the nation's journey towards building an inclusive, equitable, and quality education system. The continuity lies in the persistent efforts to expand access to education, promote inclusivity, and improve educational outcomes across various demographic segments. For instance, the National Policy on Education of 1968 provided the basis for promoting a standardized educational system and fostering a sense of national integration (Ministry of Education, 1968). Subsequent policies, such as the NPE of 1986 and its modifications in 1992, continued this focus on universalizing elementary education, addressing disparities, and promoting social justice through education. These policies emphasized the importance of providing education to underprivileged groups, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and girls, thereby ensuring continuity in efforts towards inclusivity and equity in education.

Enhancing excellence in education has continually featured in Indian educational policies. While early policies focused on expanding access, subsequent reforms have emphasized improving educational standards and learning outcomes. For instance, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001, aimed to enhance the quality of elementary education by providing infrastructure, trained teachers, and learning materials (Ministry of Education, 2001). Similarly, the Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 mandated norms and standards for infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and quality of education to ensure improved learning



outcomes (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). These efforts represent a continuity in the focus on quality enhancement in Indian education policies.

However, alongside continuity, Indian educational policies have also undergone significant changes to adapt to evolving socio-economic realities and emerging challenges. One notable change is the increasing emphasis on skill development and vocational education to address the demands of the modern workforce. Policies such as the National Skill Development Policy of 2009 and the introduction of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in 2013 reflect this shift towards promoting employability and entrepreneurship among youth. Additionally, the New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 stands for a complete overhaul of the education system, focusing on holistic development, flexibility, and multidisciplinary learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). The NEP advocates for early childhood care and education, integration of technology, promotion of regional languages, and fostering research and innovation in education, reflecting the changing priorities and aspirations of the nation (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Changes in governance structures and administrative processes have also influenced educational policies in India. The RTE Act of 2009 introduced significant changes in governance by mandating the establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) to ensure community participation and monitor the functioning of schools (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). Similarly, the NEP of 2020 proposes the establishment of various institutional mechanisms, including the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) and the National Research Foundation (NRF), to strengthen governance and accountability in the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2020). These changes reflect a shift towards decentralized governance and increased stakeholder participation in educational policymaking and implementation.

The continuity and changes in Indian educational policies since independence reflect the nation's commitment to creating a solid education system that promotes inclusivity, equality, and meets the demands of a dynamic society. While the focus on expanding access, promoting inclusivity, and improving quality remains consistent, changes in policies reflect the evolving socio-economic context, emerging challenges, and aspirations for the future. These continuous efforts and adaptations underscore India's resolve to harness the transformative power of education for individual empowerment and national development.

Duty of the centre and state authorities in devising educational policies

The role of both the central and state governments in devising educational policies is delineated by the constitutional provisions that establish a shared responsibility for education between the two levels of government. Article 246 of the Indian Constitution provides for a division of powers between the Union and state governments, with education falling under the Concurrent List (List III). This means that matters related to education can be legislated by both central and state authorities. The central government is instrumental in shaping national-level policies and frameworks for education, setting overarching goals and standards, and providing financial support and assistance to states (Ministry of Education, 1986). For instance, the NPE of 1986, followed by its subsequent modifications in 1992, set the stage for comprehensive educational growth in the country, outlining principles and targets to guide the states in formulating their



policies (Ministry of Education, 1986; Ministry of Education, 1992). Additionally, the central government also establishes autonomous bodies and councils such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to coordinate as well as oversee educational initiatives at the national level (University Grants Commission Act, 1956; National Council of Educational Research and Training Act, 1961)'.

On the other hand, state governments oversee the enforcement of educational policies within their respective jurisdictions, tailoring policies and programs to address local needs and priorities (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1950). State governments have the authority to establish and manage educational institutions, formulate state-specific curriculum frameworks, and allocate resources for educational development (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1950). States play a crucial role in extending educational access and addressing regional disparities by implementing targeted interventions and initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2001). For example, state-level programs such as the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) focus on improving access to secondary education and enhancing its quality, reflecting the state's efforts to address specific challenges within their education systems (Ministry of Education, 2001). State governments collaborate with the central government and other stakeholders to implement national interventions like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, with an aim to achieve universal education besides enhancing educational outcomes across the country (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Overall, the constitutional provisions and the division of powers between the central and state governments establish a collaborative framework for devising educational policies in India since independence. While the central government sets the overarching vision and standards for education and provides financial and institutional support, state governments are responsible for the implementation and customization of policies to address local needs and challenges. This shared responsibility reflects the federal nature of the Indian polity and underscores the importance of cooperative federalism in promoting educational development and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all.

Conclusion

It is obvious that all major Indian educational policies share common themes aimed at creating an inclusive, equitable, and quality-driven education system. They emphasize universal access to education, especially for marginalized groups, and consistently promote curriculum reforms to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Vocational training and skill development are recurring priorities, reflecting the need to align education with employment. Different policies also uphold the three-language formula to foster linguistic harmony and national integration. Teacher training, the use of technology, and the promotion of constitutional values are central to enhancing educational quality. Additionally, there is a strong focus on lifelong learning, holistic development, and community participation to ensure a well-rounded and effective education system.

In conclusion, India's educational policies since independence have been instrumental in addressing multifaceted challenges and shaping the trajectory of the education system towards achieving inclusivity, quality, and relevance. From the early emphasis on expanding access to education to the recent reforms aimed at fostering innovation and holistic development, these



policies have evolved to meet the changing needs of the population and adapt to the dynamic socio-economic landscape. The continuity in efforts to promote equity, improve quality, and enhance access underscores the efforts to build an educational system that caters to the diverse needs of its population. However, alongside continuity, significant changes in policies reflect the evolving priorities and aspirations of the nation, with a growing emphasis on skill development, technology integration, and innovation in education. The collaborative framework established between the central and state governments, guided by constitutional provisions, underscores the importance of cooperative federalism in driving educational development, ensuring that all have equal access to a quality educational experience. Moving forward, sustained efforts and collaborative approaches will be essential to address emerging challenges and build an education system that empowers individuals and fosters national development in the 21st century.

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