NEP 2020-Youth Employabilities and Vulnerabilities

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In the development of a country education, employment, growth play pivotal roles. While national growth, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross Value Added (GVA) have shown noticeable progress, the rise in employment has been stagnated, leading to a condition of jobless growth. Such growth is not equitable and sustainable in long run. Therefore the primary goal for the government should be to generate employment opportunities by building a skilled workforce. This can only achieve through a sound and effective education policy that goes beyond conventional learning method. It is expected that NEP 2020 will take the responsibilities of realizing this visionary goal. This paper will focus on the condition of unemployment in India and how unemployment condition in India have evolved over time. It will also explore the policy paradigm in the education sector in pre NEP 2020 and assess their effectiveness in achieving long-standing goals. Additionally, it will analyze the factors that set NEP 2020 apart from previous policies and unveil the effectiveness and policy constraint of the new policy.

Keywords: national policy on education, nep, unemployment, growth

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1. Introduction

The three key components of nation-building and state-building missions are growth, employment, and education. There is a general belief that education leads to growth, and the nation's growth rate sets the blueprint for other important components in the nation-building process. However, the cause and effect relationship among these components is not as straightforward as previously assumed.

According to reports from various organizations, there are concerns about the employment vulnerabilities of the youth. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported that although Gross Value Added experienced average growth of 6.7% between 2012 and 2019, the employment growth rate was unsatisfactory, at less than 1%. Additionally, youth unemployment nearly tripled from 5.7% in 2000 to 17.5% in 2019, (Jobless growth) highlighting a significant rise in joblessness. The Indian education system is considered one of the contributing factors to the low employability among youth, as the correlation between education and unemployment has shown a positive relationship. The proportion of unemployed educated youth rose from 54.2% in 2000 to a staggering 65.7% in 2022. Graduates faced an unemployment rate of 29.1%, almost nine times higher than the 3.4% rate among illiterate individuals, while those with secondary or higher education faced an unemployment rate six times higher, at 18.4%. (Kambli,2024)

The current education system in India is criticized for focusing on rote memorization and promoting success based on academic achievements rather than on practical, skill-based learning. To address these challenges, an innovative and flexible education system is needed, and the National Policy on Education has made efforts to transform the Indian education system into an innovative, flexible model.

The history of national education policies in India dates back to 1968 when the first National Policy on Education was introduced during Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister. It was followed by the second policy in 1986, and after a prolonged gap of 34 years, the third national education policy was initiated by the NDA government.

The new policy aims to address employability and educational reforms, building on the foundations laid out by the preceding policies (Sahu, Behera, 2022).

The National Policy on Education included several key provisions. The 1968 policy emphasized the establishment of agricultural universities in each state to harness the potential of the agricultural sector for employing the nation's youth. It also focused on technical education and practical training. Additionally, it addressed the continuous manpower needs of the country in the agricultural and industrial sectors (NPE,1968).

In the 1986 policy, there was a focus on decoupling degrees from specific jobs. It proposed that vocational education should encompass 10% of higher secondary education by 1995 and 25% by 2000, with an emphasis on courses tailored to local needs (Deccan Herald) The policy also aimed to integrate work experience into middle school education to build students' confidence and practical skills. Vocational education at the higher secondary level was designed not only to prepare students for college but also to equip school leavers with skills for their future endeavors. The policy also introduced an apprentice program for various courses. The two educational policies, the 1968 policy and the National Policy on Education in 1986, faced several challenges in achieving their goals. The 1968 policy encountered issues related to accessibility, quality, quantity, efficiency, monetary allocation, and lack of proper action plans. The central government's role was also deemed negligible in the formulation and implementation of the policy.

Similarly, the 1986 policy encountered challenges with university-level accessibility and the imposition of capitation fees for technical education, creating barriers for financially disadvantaged students (Significant shift in the education policy of india).

The newly introduced policy, referred to as NEP 2020, is a visionary document aimed at addressing these challenges. It focuses on generating youth employment and making vocational education accessible to all segments of society at various cognitive levels. Additionally, it aims to bridge the gap between academia and industry by implementing skill-oriented education at higher education levels.

NEP 2020 also includes provisions for short-term certificate courses in skill development and emphasizes the creation of an industrially fit and skilled workforce. This new policy focuses on providing flexibility to students and encourages the development of expertise in various skills through work experiences.

2. Condition of Unemployment in India

Unemployment has been a significant and enduring issue in India since the post-independence period. Initially, there was a misguided belief that the labor-intensive agriculture sector could easily absorb the growing unemployment rates. However, as the country developed, it became clear that this was not the case (Labour and employment) The 1991 liberalization brought about a transformative shift in the unemployment trend. The privatization of state-owned enterprises and increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in the manufacturing sector created a surge in labor demand, leading to a substantial shift from farm to non-farm activities, and a marked expansion of the service sector.

While unemployment rates dipped below 3% in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they later rose to between 3% and 4%. By 2019, the unemployment rate reached a peak of 5.8%, but by 2022, it had declined to 4%. The early 2000s witnessed a robust growth in the information technology (IT) and IT-enabled services sectors, attracting a significant number of educated Indian job seekers. This growth was driven by the development of large-scale applications for global clients, as well as the provision of support services such as computer-aided manufacturing, payroll, accounting, and cellular communication. Additionally, the rise of IT-enabled services saw a proliferation of Indians trained to speak with foreign accents to cater to customers primarily based in the global north (India's employment crisis, 2024)

Despite the hiring of thousands of people in various sectors, the issue of unemployment has not been adequately addressed. Economic growth following liberalization did not result in increased employment, leading to what is known as "jobless growth." During this period, the employment growth rate in various sectors remained negative. The shortage of jobs and problems related to unskilled and educated unemployment have created a crisis

in the overall growth of the country (Sharma et.al,2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, not only India but every corner of the world experienced significant turbulence. The employment rates of the country decreased sharply, with private sector employees losing their jobs on short notice, and daily wage earners and small entrepreneurs facing numerous difficulties in coping with the turmoil. In June 2020, the unemployment rate declined to 11%. However, during the initial period of the strict national lockdown, the rates of unemployment were even higher, reaching over 20% in April and May. The repercussions of the pandemic led to India's unemployment rate spiking to 23.5% in April, with urban areas being particularly vulnerable. The unemployment rate in urban areas was 24.95%, while in rural India, it was 22.89%.

3. NEP 2020 and Youth Employment

In our previous discussion, we delved into the pressing issue of unemployment in India and the government's strategies to enhance employment opportunities. It became evident that the government's initiatives were inadequate in effectively addressing the escalating unemployment crisis. Acknowledging the pivotal role of education in combating unemployment, the government introduced two national education policies, both of which fell short of expectations.

The NEP 2020 policy was designed to cultivate a skilled workforce through vocational education, departing from traditional educational practices. The Ministry of Education emphatically stressed the significance of offering multidisciplinary courses to nurture students' innate talents. This policy aimed to bridge the gaps in our education system and outlined various strategies to bolster employability.

Skill education - The new National Education Policy (NEP) places a significant emphasis on skill-based education. In India, there is a critical need for skill education to address unemployment. However, the demand for skill education in India is surprisingly low. Many professionally educated individuals in India lack employability skills. To address this, NEP 2020 strongly advocates for vocational skill training starting from the school level.

Vocational education will be offered by higher education institutions independently or in collaboration with businesses and non-profit organizations. The government has also taken bold initiatives under the NEP, such as the establishment of the National Skill Development Corporation, National Vocational Education Qualification Framework, and Skill Development Bureau (Sharma, 2023).

Reorganizing college curriculum - The current college curriculum is unduly restrictive and conservative, stifling new ideas and creativity. The New Education Policy (NEP) is adamant about reorganizing the curriculum to foster innovation and open-mindedness. A pivotal aspect of this initiative is the wholehearted promotion of an open curriculum to ignite creativity and independent thinking. The new curriculum must embody a multidisciplinary approach, seamlessly integrating arts and humanities with science and technology to yield unequivocally positive learning outcomes. This concerted effort is anticipated to not only enhance creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, but also communication skills. Drawing from India's rich historical tradition of multidisciplinary learning of the time of Takshashilla and Nalanda University, a return to these roots is emphatically advocated (Sharma, 2020).

Encourage digital education- Digital education is imperative in today's digitalized era. By seamlessly integrating technology with education, the NEP empowers students to acquire the essential skills needed to excel in a digital society. The goal of digital education is to equip young individuals with the capability to navigate the digital era and pursue technical jobs in this digitalized environment. Under the NEP 2020, digital education will be seamlessly integrated into the curriculum in a phased manner, commencing from the primary level. At the high school level, students will have access to a wide array of digital resources, including interactive learning tools, simulations, and online assessments.

Conduct employability assessments - Higher institutes in India need to conduct employability assessments of incoming students. Many school students acquire basic skills like computer skills, mathematics, and English reading. However, it is important to assess for potential gaps in these skills. Based on the assessment results, the institutes should provide training programs to fill these gaps.

It is crucial to address these skill gaps to enhance employability, as emphasized in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020, 2023).

The institution must be measured in terms of outcomes -Historically, institutions have been assessed based on faculty, infrastructure, and student enrollment. However, NEP 2020 asserts that institutions should be unequivocally evaluated based on outcomes such as student learning and employability. Only then will institutions prioritize ensuring students are well-prepared for employment (NEP 2020, 2023).

Encourage internship programs - The National Education Policy (NEP) emphasizes the importance of internship programs to provide students with practical work experience. Educational institutions should actively promote internship programs to equip students with project-based knowledge, as theoretical knowledge alone may not be sufficient for employment (Gedar et.al, 2023).

Reforming the College Examination System- Traditionally, college examinations have solely focused on theory, but relying only on theoretical knowledge is inadequate for students to acquire practical skills or to compete in the modern world. Therefore, it is crucial that college examinations be restructured to incorporate a balance of theoretical and application-based questions (Sharma, 2023).

Teacher training program- The quality of nation's citizen is intrinsically linked to the quality of education they receive, and this, in turn, hinges upon the quality of their educators. The Indian education commission astutely remarked " the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms."(Pradhan,2014) Recognizing the pivotal role of quality teachers, the Indian government prioritize various teacher training programs. The national education policy mandates that teachers should demonstrate proficiency in at least two languages.

Moreover, the government is committed to continuous professional development of teachers, ensuring the provision of workshop and in service training. In support of ongoing learning initiatives a strong emphasis is placed on utilizing platform like DIKSHA, SWAYAM etc ("Teacher in NEP 2020").

Change the social stigma- Former Vice President of India Hamid Anshari has pointed out that there is a stigma attached to vocational education.

He explained that due to people mindset, integrating vocational education into the school curriculum has been a challenge ("need to remove stigma attached to vocational education, 2014). Vocational education is often seen as inferior as compared to studying in higher education institute. According to a report from NSSO, 24% of students from rural areas are enrolled in vocational courses, while only 8.3% of students from urban area are enrolled in such courses. The stigma associated with vocational education can change significantly with the implementation of NEP 2020 (Parvanda, 2022).

NEP 2020 talks about these steps to increase employability- Unemployment is one of the major issue along with non-availability of skilled workers. It happens due to existing loopholes in the education system. That's why NEP 2020 talks about filling up the gap in the education system. Now, the major challenge is the implementation of these suggestions by the government. The government has already taken some steps to start the restructuring of the education system. There are some criticisms and suggestions which are mentioned in the later part of the article.

4. Critical Appraisal

After 34 years of significant gaps, the National Education Policy 2020 is finally undergoing implementation with the aim of addressing new developmental needs. The policy addresses various educational challenges such as low enrollment, high dropout rates, teacher absenteeism, and lack of infrastructure. The NEP takes a comprehensive approach to redefining all the educational challenges faced by the country in the 21st century. The policy deconstructs and reimagines the entire educational framework of the nation. Despite the visionary nature of NEP 2020 in the field of education, it is not exempt from critical appraisal, which will be thoroughly discussed in this section. The NEP 2020 aims to provide vocational training from class 6 onwards, promising to enhance students' abilities to become vocationally skilled individuals. It will encompass their practical knowledge in various fields and nurture their life skills. Academic and industrial collaboration in courses will be customized to meet the evolving market demand. However, it is important to question whether the NEP sole aim of education is to develop students' vocational ability.

While the NEP 2020 enables students to develop their industrial capacities, crucial for national development, it falls short in nurturing the students' affective domain skills, which are equally essential. Furthermore, while vocational education can produce skilled individuals, it is imperative for the government to actively facilitate job opportunities for these skilled individuals. Otherwise, the result will be an abundance of skilled, yet unemployed individuals ("NEP will reshape skilling",2024) The concept of choosing a subject, as revolutionized by NEP 2020, breaks away from the traditional, rigid methods of subject selection. It discards the strict separation between different disciplines, allowing students to explore subjects based on their interests in a more multidisciplinary and holistic manner. The autonomy in subject selection is believed to enrich students' knowledge in diverse settings. However, it may not be equally beneficial for all students. While it could provide opportunities for future exposure for privileged students, it could present a dilemma for those from rural backgrounds who lack access to guidance and counseling in subject selection. Additionally, the combination of unrelated subjects, such as history and chemistry, may not provide a cohesive understanding. Furthermore, implementing such diverse pedagogical settings can lead to chaos in schools and colleges (Nathani,2023)The National Education Policy (NEP) prioritizes regional languages as a medium of instruction, which is crucial for preserving regional identity. Providing education in the mother tongue can help students grasp knowledge more effectively. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has approved 19 engineering colleges in 10 different states for studying engineering in six Indian languages, which is commendable. However, using regional languages as a medium of instruction in higher education may not effectively prepare students to compete in a global market where English communication skills are considered essential ("Language as barrier" 2022)The current plan is to allocate 6% of the GDP to the education sector for funding. However, this may not be feasible as the GDP of the country fluctuates. Even if the full 6% of the GDP is allocated, it might not be enough to meet the ambitious goals of the policy. Implementing this policy would require significant institutional infrastructure, which would be challenging to provide for every school and college across India's diverse regions.

Despite the complexity and bulkiness of the associated documents, this policy is the most forward-thinking and futuristic compared to previous ones.

5. Concluding Remarks

Unemployment has long been a significant obstacle to national development in India. Despite various government initiatives to address this issue, the correlation between economic growth and employment has not been satisfactory, resulting in what is known as 'jobless growth.' The current NDA government has recognized the devastating impact of widespread unemployment and has taken proactive steps to address the issue. One such initiative is the formulation of a new education policy that prioritizes skill-based and vocational education over conventional methods. This comprehensive approach is expected to not only tackle national challenges but also produce a highly skilled workforce for the advancement of India. However, it's important to acknowledge that the document does have some associated loopholes, despite being a long-standing vision.

To address these loopholes effectively, it's crucial to establish robust administrative mechanisms for scrutinizing policy effectiveness and fostering seamless coordination among different ministries. The development of proper infrastructure is paramount for unleashing the full potential of the policy, especially in providing vocational education, which necessitates the establishment of concrete institutional frameworks. The government should demonstrate unwavering commitment by releasing substantial funds for infrastructure development and ensuring an efficient distribution mechanism. Adequate budgetary allocations and grants-in-aid should be readily available for these initiatives. Additionally, the government must take assertive steps to create abundant employment opportunities for skilled workers. Moreover, it should proactively provide guidance and counseling facilities for both academic and extracurricular activities, and enlist well-trained teachers in communication and information communication technology (ICT). By implementing these corrective measures, the policy's far-reaching benefits can be enjoyed by a broad segment of society.

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