

Gender Equity in NEP 2020: A Pathway to Inclusive and Accessible Education

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a transformative approach to gender equity in Indian education, aiming to eliminate long-standing disparities and promote inclusivity. A key initiative under NEP 2020 is the Gender Inclusion Fund, established by the Government of India to ensure 100% enrollment of girls in schools, enhance their participation in higher education, and reduce gender gaps at all learning levels. The policy also emphasizes increasing female representation in leadership roles within educational institutions, such as principals, teachers, wardens, and physical trainers, while introducing alternative recruitment pathways for female educators, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, NEP 2020 prioritizes the safety and security of school-going girls, recognizing its importance in fostering sustained learning. By integrating gender-sensitive pedagogy and promoting equal access to education, the policy lays the foundation for an inclusive and just society. Its successful implementation holds the potential to empower individuals of all genders, ensuring their meaningful contribution to national development..

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Gender equity, Gender inclusion fund, Gender equality, Women's empowerment, etc.

1 Introduction

In spite of tremendous advancements in recent decades, gender inequality in Indian education has remained a chronic problem. Even though India has significantly improved gender-neutral access to education, disparities still persist in a number of areas of the educational system. Historically, girls and

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women have been disadvantaged in their pursuit of education due to a complex interaction of social, economic, and cultural forces [1].

Concerns about the quality of education females get also persist. In addition to limiting girls' chances and ambitions, gender biases in curriculum content, instructional strategies, and career counselling may perpetuate stereotypes. Beyond the classroom, these prejudices often affect women's career opportunities and cultural expectations [2]. It needs a diversified strategy that goes beyond just raising enrolment rates to address these discrepancies. Addressing ingrained societal norms, boosting educational standards, upgrading infrastructure, and establishing encouraging surroundings are all necessary to help ladies in pursuing their academic objectives. It is essential to comprehend the subtleties of these differences in order to create effective policies and interventions as India continues its efforts to achieve gender parity in education [3].

A. Gender equity

Respecting everyone equally, regardless of gender, is the essence of gender equality. It also entails tackling gender disparities that restrict an individual's access to better health, education, and economic opportunities because of their gender [1]. Gender equality is based on two fundamental principles: impartiality and fairness. While impartiality is defined as treating all parties equally, fairness is concerned with just treatment that is free from bias or favouritism. In its most basic form, equity refers to meeting communities where they are and distributing opportunities and resources as necessary to provide equitable results for every member of the community [4]. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender equity is the provision of justice and fairness in the allocation of obligations and rewards among men, women, and all genders. Due to past perceptions of females, transgender individuals, and nonbinary persons as "weaker" or less significant than men, gender equality is crucial [5]. The gender roles and expectations of men, women, and all genders at work, home, and in society today have been shaped and altered in part by gender parity. When everyone, regardless of gender, is respected for their abilities, talents, and skills, our world is a better place [6].

B. Benefits of gender equity

Gender equality enables individuals to follow their aspirations regardless of their gender and enhances possibilities for everyone. A few advantages of gender equality are listed below.

1. Health care benefits

Due to the medical profession's preference for male anatomy in research and instruction, we cannot stress the significance of gender parity in health care enough. Congress did not enact legislation mandating that women and minorities be included in clinical trials for the research of illnesses and cures until 1993. Even now, however, physicians are more likely to write off a woman's medical discomfort as emotional or mental, or even to assume that the patient is hypochondriac. When there is true gender equality in healthcare, people of all genders are respected and given good treatment rather than having their suffering minimised because of their gender identity and physical characteristics [1], [7].

2. Workplace benefits

Employers gain when the opinions of others are valued and accepted without bias, discrimination, or partiality. Both men and women are more satisfied with their lives in an atmosphere at work that is free from injustices and embraces variety of opinion. In addition to opening up many opportunities, gender parity fosters creativity and innovation [1], [8].

3. Societal benefits

Gender equality serves as a bridge to treat everyone equally, regardless of gender identity, and it eliminates the barriers to advancement that are ingrained in our culture. By giving women greater chances to succeed in fields that are now dominated by males, it addresses issues with our labour force. It promotes cooperation in families, communities, the workplace, and politics by enabling people of all genders to share their opinions without worrying about prejudice or intolerance. On all fronts, gender parity improves community safety by lowering violence and criminal activity against women [1], [9].

C. Gender-related provisions in NEP 2020

In addition to guaranteeing that women and girls have access to education, a holistic approach to gender equality supported by NEP 2020 emphasises the quality and relevance of education for them. In order to promote more gender equality in Indian society, the strategy seeks to establish a more inclusive and fair educational system by emphasising the several facets. The NEP 2020 highlights gender inclusivity as one of its main principles [1]. The following are some of the NEP 2020 requirements pertaining to gender equity:

- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs):** "Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), minorities, and Below Poverty Line (BPL)" households are among the socially and economically disadvantaged populations for whom these residential schools are particularly intended. By educating females, KGBVs seek to eliminate gender inequality and empower them.
- **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Awasiya Vidyalayas and Hostels:** These establishments provide females access to high-quality education by offering them educational possibilities.
- **Self-Défense Training for Girls:** The goal of programs such as "Rani Laxmi Bai Atmaraksha Prashikshan" is to raise girls' self-confidence and safety by teaching them self-defence techniques.
- **Scholarships and Stipends:** The PG Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child and the Swami Vivekanand Single Girl Child Fellowship are two of the scholarships and stipends for females that are being introduced by NEP 2020. Girls who are "children with special needs (CWSN)" are also given stipends.
- **Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF):** NEP 2020 allots cash to assist gender-inclusive projects, including the building of infrastructure, free textbooks, and uniforms.
- **Inclusion of Transgender Children:** The NEP for the first time recognises "Education for Transgender" and suggests a 25% reserve for transgender students in schools.

Dr. Alpana Dubey

- **Inclusive Education for Disabled Students:** For children with impairments, the NEP 2020 seeks to raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER). It underlines that kids with disabilities should finish both primary and secondary school.

A system of education that supports gender equality, inclusivity, and empowerment is what NEP 2020 aims to establish. India hopes to create an educational environment that is more accessible and equal by putting these laws into effect. A major focus of "the National Education Policy 2020" is the advancement of gender parity in education. A number of steps are outlined in Section 6 of the policy, "Equitable and Inclusive Education," to overcome gender inequities in Indian education [10].

2 Literature Review

(Gupta, 2022) [11] If India hopes to become a more powerful, developed nation with a higher status. This can only be accomplished if persistent efforts are made to reduce the gender gap between transgender people and boys and girls. The nation has also recently achieved progress in the field of education. The "Gender Inclusion Fund" was established under the "National Education Policy (NEP)-2020" to support the growth of girls. To provide all girls access to high-quality, fair education, the GOI will set up a "Gender Inclusion Fund." The fund will prioritise achieving a record-breaking rate of higher education participation and 100% school enrolment for girls, reducing gender disparities at all levels, promoting gender equality and inclusion in society, and expanding girls' leadership potential via constructive, polite conversations.

(Punyashil S. Tembhurne, 2023) [12] To reach one's full potential, education is a prerequisite. "The New Education Policy 2020 (NEP)" was introduced, marking a shift in India's educational policy after 34 years. With a gross enrolment ratio of 100% for schooling by 2030 and 50% for higher education by 2035, this new program seeks to achieve universal education in India. The provision covers the initial steps, such as the establishment of Special Education Zones and a Gender Inclusion Fund, aimed at providing disadvantaged girls with an equal education. The objective also aims to increase women's leadership potential by means of constructive and polite discussions with female leaders in the educational system. This would assure gender equality and involvement in society, reduce gender inequalities at all levels, and result in a record higher education participation rate if it is put into reality. An effort has been made to examine the New Education Policy 2020's impact on women's education in this research.

(Mishra, 2020) [6] seeks to highlight the role that education plays in empowering women in communities and families. It addresses the ways in which education may advance the rights of women, gender equality, safety, and a reduction in gender prejudice. Women's education is deemed important, and suggestions are made in India's "National Education Policy (NEP) 2020". However, obstacles still stand in the way of its implementation. This essay will discuss the suggestions for women's education in NEP 2020 and look at possible ways to get over implementation roadblocks.

(Nandy, 2021) [13] The renowned educator Swami Vivekananda once said, "Since a bird cannot fly on one wing, there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved."

National Education Policy 2020: The Key To Development In India (Volume-2)

Women may contribute significantly to the growth of the family and the country as a whole. One important step towards women's empowerment is education. According to government studies, there are still certain obstacles to gender discrimination and women's rights in the twenty-first century. Based on "the Global Gender Gap Index 2020", this article highlights the important challenge that Indian women continue to face, even beyond the literacy rate. However, the government's new programs and regulations, together with their comprehensive education and optimism, guarantee women's futures will be varied and desired.

(Parihar et al., 2024) [14] This study compares Indian educational institutions using an overview of the New Policy 2020. It finds that our system is flawed and that we still have a long way to go before we achieve SDGs 4 and 5. The researchers have also suggested several ways to improve our educational system and make it more inclusive and equitable. Additionally, they look at the Education 2030 Framework's recommendations for 'Refurbishing Public Education in India with an intent to make It Gender-Inclusive.' Finally, they suggest a multi-sectoral strategy to empower women as a prerequisite.

(Khan, 2023) [15] The research looks at how the strategy addresses gender differences in learning results, retention rates, and educational access. Additionally, it looks at how the NEP combats gender stereotypes and fosters a climate that is welcoming and empowering for all students, regardless of gender. The success of initiatives like curricular revisions, teacher preparation, and the establishment of inclusive and safe spaces in educational institutions is examined in detail. Additionally, the study highlights the shortcomings and difficulties in putting the NEP 2020 into practice with regard to women's empowerment and gender equality. These include concerns about putting policies into effect, enhancing instructors' ability, and monitoring systems for gauging advancement.

(Mohanani et al., 2024) [1] With policies targeted at increasing female enrolment and retention, developing gender-sensitive curriculum, and placing more women in leadership positions in education, NEP 2020 seeks to overcome historical gender imbalances. In addition to analysing contemporary issues including cultural norms and financial obstacles, the report offers stakeholders practical suggestions. Innovative strategies to dispel gender stereotypes and raise understanding among administrators, instructors, and students are examined. This study adds to the continuing discussion on changing India's educational system by evaluating the chances and obstacles to reaching the gender equality objectives of NEP 2020. The results imply that while the policy offers a strong basis for change, concerted efforts, ongoing dedication, and cultural shifts are necessary for its effectiveness, which might affect societal gender equality in general.

(Khobung, 2023) [8] In academics, gender is a recurring topic. As a result, a great deal of study has been done on this topic for a long time, and several upcoming works have been generated. Additionally, it still plays a significant role in public policy procedures that aim to advance society's progress towards equity. One such document that aimed to include gender concerns from several viewpoints is National Education Policy 2020. Topics like the Curricular Integration of Essential Subjects, Skills, and Capabilities; Service Environment and Culture; and School-Level Inclusive and Equitable Education all represent it. Governments may adopt a number of actions to advance gender equality in higher education under the

subject of "Learning for All." In addition to providing a short overview of previous national educational policy, this study elaborates on these elements.

3 Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant step toward gender equity in education by promoting gender-sensitive pedagogy, equal access to learning opportunities, and the dismantling of subject-wise stereotypes. However, achieving true gender equity in Indian education requires a multi-faceted approach involving sustained efforts, stakeholder collaboration, and a shift in cultural attitudes toward gender roles. The policy recognizes education as a powerful tool for empowering girls and women, ensuring they receive equal opportunities to develop their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. A key initiative under NEP 2020 is the establishment of a Gender Inclusion Fund by the Government of India (GOI) to support equitable and quality education for girls. This fund aims to ensure 100% enrollment of girls in schools, increase their participation in higher education, and address gender gaps at all levels of learning. Additionally, NEP 2020 highlights the importance of increasing female representation in leadership positions within educational institutions, including principals, teachers, wardens, and physical trainers. Addressing the gender imbalance among teachers, particularly in rural areas, the policy proposes alternative recruitment pathways for female educators while maintaining merit and professional qualifications. Moreover, NEP 2020 prioritizes the safety and security of school-going girls, both inside and outside educational institutions, recognizing the critical role a secure environment plays in promoting sustained learning. Gender equity is not merely a policy objective but a fundamental principle that must shape the entire educational system. By ensuring inclusive and accessible education for all, NEP 2020 paves the way for a more progressive, equitable, and just society. The successful implementation of these measures promises transformative benefits, fostering a future where education empowers every individual, irrespective of gender, to thrive and contribute to national development.

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National Education Policy 2020: The Key To Development In India (Volume-2)

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