

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON SKILL EDUCATION IN NPE 1986 AND NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

Skill education has become a key element of national development in the light of globalisation, advancement in technology and the dynamic labor market needs. The education policy in India is decisive in the orientation and provision of skills based learning. This paper includes a comparative review of skill education as seen in 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) and 2020 National Education Policy (NEP). Despite the three-plus decades between them, both policies recognize the need for competency development to develop employability and to enhance social fairness and the ability to boost economic growth. The paper looks at how the two policies are similar in the context of their vocational orientation focus, experiential learning, inclusion, state responsibility, and their national development objectives. Simultaneously, the paper demonstrates the major differences, which can be interpreted as the shift in the educational philosophy and practice. Although NPE 1986 dated its focus on skill education as a form of vocational education to particular occupations and applied it as an alternative to general academics, NEP 2020 is holistic and integrative in nature. The new policy focuses on exposure to skills at an early age, multidisciplinary education, flexibility in the education pathway, education through technology, entrepreneurship, and life-long learning. The paper also examines institutional differences in the integration, evaluation systems, teacher training, and application of online platforms to master skills. The paper highlights the development process of skill education in India as a limited vocational model to an all-encompassing, learner-focused, and future-oriented ecosystem. The discussion adds to the existing knowledge of the continuity and change of policies, providing an insight into whether NEP 2020 could overcome the modern workforce challenges and improve the development of human capital in India.

Keywords: Skill Education, NPE 1986, NEP 2020.

Introduction

Education is a critical condition to develop an economic, social, and human capital of nations, and the education of skills turned out to be one of the most important ones in the modern world. In an ever globalizing economy, whose industry is technologically advancing such that the labor markets are dynamic and the needs of the society are dynamic, education has been slowly shifting towards less emphasis on rote learning and more on the enhancement of practical, employable and life skills. National education policies in India provide a guidance system that depicts the educational philosophy of this country, its developmental priorities and social-economic aspirations at various stages of time. Among them, the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have already become the landmark texts that have had a specific impact on the orientation of the skills education in the nation. (Singh et al., 2022)

Despite the over 30 years gap, the two policies value the relevance of skill training in solving aspects of unemployment, social disparity and economic development. NPE 1986 was unveiled during a time when India was working towards increasing access to education and overcoming inequalities

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between disadvantaged groups in the society. Most of the skills education under this policy was vocational but was directed towards equipping learners with skills to fit a certain occupation. In contrast, NEP 2020 is responsive to the needs of the knowledge-based and technology-driven economy that is characterised by flexibility, innovation, multidisciplinary learning and lifelong skill development. It aims to harmonize the skill training with mainstream education and bring it to the international standards. (Mahanta, 2023)

NPE 1986 was proposed in the country when India was struggling with the problem of low literacy, unequal educational opportunities, and rather large socio-economic differences. The main aim of the policy was to encourage universal education and take care of the underprivileged ones like the women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the rural population. The conception of Skill education, as provided by NPE 1986 was more of a vocational education, which focused on equipping learners with some particular job to do, which would minimally contribute to unemployment. (Kumar, 2023) Its policy was aimed at empowering technical and vocational institutions including Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics, and to provide vocational courses in the secondary schooling levels. In the implementation of NPE 1986, the process remained highly centralized with the government taking the key part in the design, funding, and subsequent expansion of the institutions. Nevertheless, with poor finances, poor infrastructure as well as the preference of the society on academic learning, the execution of vocational aspect and skill-based elements was undisproportionate and not as efficient as they were supposed to be.

Conversely, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was drafted keeping in view the nexus between a fast evolving global economy, technology, and with the necessity of exploiting the demographic dividend in India. It has substituted the 34-year-old NPE 1986 with a more detailed and visionary framework which focuses on flexibility, inclusivity, and lifelong learning. According to NEP 2020, skill education is seen as a part of the education system in all levels starting with early schooling until higher education. (Rajitha, 2023) It encourages evidence-based learning, enterprise learning, internships, apprenticeships, and collaboration with the industry and aligns skills development to the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). NEP 2020 implementation is participatory and a gradual process that has implicated both the state and central government since education is not a cumulative topic. (Saha & Parimal Sarkar, 2023)

To appreciate continuity and change in the educational policy vision in India it is thus important to do a comparative study on the relation between skill education in NPE 1986 and NEP 2020. This research paper reveals how the concept, scope, and delivery of skill education has changed over the years by considering the differences and such similarities between the two policies. In addition to informing policy development, such an analysis will also contribute to estimating the readiness of the Indian education system to address the needs of future workers and development objectives.

Objectives of the Study

This research paper is the attempt to understand and explain the concept of skill education as presented in the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Among the main aims are to find out the similarities between the two policies regarding their approach into vocational orientation, employability, learning by experience as well as social inclusion. The other goals of the research include examination of the key differences in the scope, structure, and application of skill training under both policies, the transition towards the narrow vocational model of skill development into a comprehensive and integrated approach to the task. The study also aims at knowing how the development of skill education in India has been affected by the developments in socio-economic conditions, the techno-economic shift, and global workforce requirements. Moreover, the study will evaluate the applicability of NEP 2020 to the shortcoming of the NPE 1986 and its possible role in enhancing India human resource development. All in all, the research aims to give insights that can help educators, policymakers and researchers to know policy development and enhance skill education reform

Methodology

The current research is grounded on a descriptive and analytical research design and is completely based on the secondary sources of data. Official policy documents like the National Policy on Education 1986 and National Education Policy 2020, reports released by the ministry of education, government websites, journals and research articles as well as books and credible internet sources were used as a source of relevant information. A comparative approach has been adopted and the differences

and vibrancy of the provisions made under the two policies analyzed systematically in terms of the similarities and dissimilarities in skill education. The interpretation of policy objectives, strategy, and implementation mechanisms concerning skill development were inspired by content analysis. There were no primary data obtained, as the research is aimed at policy-level analysis instead of investigations on the empirical level. The data collected was systematically arranged, classified and critically studied to be made to come up with meaningful conclusions.

Findings of the Study

The analysis has shown that NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 acknowledge skill education as a significant aspect of national development and focus on employability, vocational orientation, and experience learning. There are, however, notable disparities in how they conceptualize and implement skill education. NPE 1986 understood skill education more as vocational training intended to address a particular job position and placed it in opposition to academic education, whereas NEP 2020 does not separate between the two and provides skill education in which holistic development is centrally concerned. It is also found that NEP 2020 is more flexible, exposes to skills at an earlier stage, integrates technology and has more chances of lifelong learning than NPE 1986. In sum, the analysis concludes that NEP 2020 is more non-exclusive and dynamic and future-oriented in its approach to skill education, which overcomes most drawbacks of the previous policy.

Similarities

Although the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 were made more than 30 years later, there are some common goals and conceptual basis that relates to skill education. Both policies appreciate education as a key national development tool and consider the development of skills as the key in generating economic growth, social mobility and employment. Although there are variations in the scale and processes involved in the implementation, the fact that the two policies have a similarity in that they both aim at preparing learners with practical competencies is a major similarity point between the two policies. (Venkateshwarlu, 2020)

One of the significant similarities between NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 is their tendency to associate education with employment. The two policies recognize the fact that academic knowledge alone can not be relied on to undertake any meaningful participation in the workforce. NPE 1986 gave vocational education an emphasized importance to equip the students to occupy the definite occupations and mainly the agricultural, industrial and services careers. Likewise, the NEP 2020 highlights the importance of skill-based education to increase employability and match the learning outcomes to the demands of the labor market. Skill education in both policies is considered to be a solution to the unemployment and underemployment among young people. (Ansari & Uttamrao Chavan, 2021)

The other similarity is that of vocation orientation in the education system. NPE 1986 also came with the idea of vocational courses in secondary level to enhance pressure on higher education and offered jobs-related options. The NEP 2020 carries on this vocational orientation by enhancing and broadening skill education in various levels of learning. Despite the fact that NEP 2020 is more integrated in its approach, both policies share commodities in the fact that vocational skills are required along with academic learning.

The practical and experiential learning is also emphasized, as the focus of both policies. NPE 1986 also focused on learning through practice especially in vocational and technical education to make sure that students learn through hands-on learning. The NEP 2020 also employs this concept through encouragement of experiential learning, internship programs, apprenticeship, and project based activities. The common assumption is that applied experience increases comprehension, memorization, and practical implementation of the skills that the learning process is more valuable and efficient. (Sharma et al., 2021)

One major commonality is the welfare over social equity and inclusion in the provision of skills. NPE 1986 particularly gave attention to the underserved populations including women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and rural people to impart vocational competencies that would enable them to change their socio-economic status. The inclusivity to skill development is also one of the priorities of NEP 2020 that is focused on socio-economically disadvantaged groups and access to quality skill education. Both policies consider skill education as the instrument of empowerment and social justice.

The other similar element is the involvement of the state in encouraging and governing skill learning. The government had a lead role in creating the vocational institutions, curriculum design and financial support of skill development programs in NPE 1986. NEP 2020 also places the initiative to make

skill education changes to the central and state governments. The skills education in both policies is considered as the public good which should be supported by policy, institutional, and long-term funding.

The merging of education with the national development objectives is also a similar feature. NPE 1986 correlated the skill education to the national priorities in terms of industrial development, rural development and technological development. NEP 2020 connects the education of skills to broader goals such as economic autonomy, innovation and competitiveness at a global level. Both of these consider skill training not as a separate effort, but as a component of a national-building process. (Dey, 2022)

Another similarity is teacher preparation and capacity building. NPE 1986 noted that there should be trained vocational teachers and technical instructors to offer quality skills training. NEP 2020 restates the role of talented and professionally trained educators, including those who have experience in the industry. The two policies acknowledge the role of good teachers in skill education as they have the ability to close the interface between theory and practice.

Both the policies also recognize the flexibility in the learning pathways to different extent. NPE 1986 tried to differentiate the educational choices by developing the vocational streams so as to provide an alternative to the strictly academic paths. The NEP 2020 builds upon this concept by offering various ways of entry and exit yet the common goal of meeting the diverse needs of learners can be observed in both policies. This is indicative of the widespread knowledge that students possess untapped differences in terms of their aptitude and interests, and skill education must reflect this fact.

Moreover, NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 are also focused on lifelong learning and lifelong skills renewal. Whereas NPE 1986 embraced out-of-school youth and needs in the area of adult education and skill training, NEP 2020 supports lifelong learning with the development of flexible education systems and lifelong professional growth. In both policies, skill education has been considered as a process rather than an intervention.

NPE 1986 and NEP 2020, although not implemented on the same scale, structure, and implementation, have a number of similarities in their approach to skill education. Both policies acknowledge the value of vocational and practical skills, the value of employability and experiential learning, the need to support inclusiveness and equity, and ensure that skills education is oriented towards the national development agenda. According to these similarities, there is a common policy vision that frames skill education as a vital element in the educational and social-economic development of India.

Dissimilarities

Education of skills has been proving to be a determinant on economic growth, ability to work, and being able to compete in the international market. Education policies in India have been instrumental in determining how the orientation, structure, and delivery of skill-based learning should be. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 are considered to be two important landmarks in the development of the education system in India. Though the two policies recognize the relevance of skills, their cognitive level is significantly different, covering spheres, strategy to be implemented, and coherence with the current socio-economic requirements. Under comparative analysis of skill education in NPE nowadays 1986 and NEP nowadays 2020, there can be understood a change of paradigm between narrow vocational orientation to an integrated and flexible and future oriented skill ecosystems.

The NPE 1986 interpreted skill education as including to a large extent vocational education and considered it as an alternative route which was intended specifically to serve students who had no possibility to request a mainstream academic education. The development of skills under this policy was separated and at the secondary level with a heavy focus on the manual, technical, and trade-based skills. Vocational courses were aimed at equipping the learners towards some specific jobs especially in the field of agriculture, industry and services but these courses were not as prestigious as the academic streams. However, NEP 2020 reinterprets skill education as being an integral and vital part of education at all levels of education, be it school or higher education. Instead of conceiving skills as a backup strategy, NEP 2020 makes skills development central to learning with the concepts of dignity of labour and vocational education and academic education being equal. (*National Education Policy 1986*, n.d.)

The other significant difference is in the age and the stage in which skill education is taught. Vocational and skill based education came in relatively later in the NPE 1986 as was traditionally given after the elementary education. This prevented the well-being of students to find interest, talents, as well as practical aptitudes at an early age. Instead, NEP 2020 incorporates skill education since elementary

and secondary education, encourages skill exposure at lower levels through experiential learning to crafts and arts, as well as vocational skills. It is thought that students are guided towards periods of internship, local vocational practices and activities since Class 6 so that skills learning is neither an intervention at the latter stage of progress.

There is also a significant difference in the understanding of skills held by the conceptual interpretation of the two policies. NPE 1986 was a more narrow and, more job specific approach and it concentrated more on employability, as outlined in specified role occupations. Skills were usually inflexible, industry-based, and could not easily cross domains. NEP 2020 extends the scope of skill education to consist of cognitive, technical, digital, social, entrepreneurial, and life skills. It appreciates the relevance of creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability which are valuable in a knowledge economy that is fast-changing. It is this expansive conceptualization that puts skill education in line with a holistic development, as opposed to job preparation. (Mondal, 2023)

The integration of both vocational and academic streams in terms of mainstream education was highly distinct in NPE 1986. The students who chose vocational education paths tended to find it hard to move back to the higher academic tracks and as a result were unable to move freely and pursue lifelong learning. NEP 2020 eliminates this strong division by promoting a free flow between vocational education and general education. Skill courses are credit-based and aligned to National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), which also means that the learner can obtain credits, change pathways, and go back to education at various stages. It is a radical change to the linear and fixed-point model of skill training in NPE 1986. (Mohanty, n.d.)

The existing differences between the two policies are also evident in the role played by higher education institutions in developing skills. The academic orientation of universities and colleges was prevalent under NPE 1986 with little focus being on practical or industry-related skills. The impartation of skills was largely restricted to Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics which were independent of the mainstream higher education. According to NEP 2020, universities are seen as multi disciplinary institutions that will actively facilitate the development of skills, internships, apprenticeships and industry-based partnerships. University undergraduate programs are supposed to be skills-based to ensure that there are various points of exit, where the competence of skills of the students is verified, such as certificates, diplomas, and degrees. (Malik, 2021)

The other important contrast is on how employability and entrepreneurship are approached. NPE 1986 involved a lot of orientation of the students towards getting work, particularly in the governmental and institutional fields. Its skill education system did not focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. However, NEP 2020 is associated with high priority to entrepreneurship education so that students should become job creators, not job seekers. The education of skills according to NEP 2020 is inextricably connected with innovation, start-ups, and local economic development so that learners can use skills to self-employ and to build local enterprises. (Malik, 2021)

Technology in imparting skills also further diversifies the two policies. In the era of NPE 1986, technological integration in education was insignificant because of the lack of infrastructure and the early stage of digital technologies. Physical workshops and traditional approaches were a major part of training skills. However, NEP 2020 is appreciating technology as an effective facilitator of skill training. It encourages digitalization of platforms and online training skills as well as virtual labs and blended learning models in order to improve accessibility and scalability. Based on the technology, this will provide skill education to the population at large as well as remote and underserved regions. (Kundu & Bej, 2021)

Another difference that exists between the two policies is the status and training of the teachers and instructors in question, involved in skill education. However, based on the NPE 1986, vocational instructors did not have systematic professional development and did not significantly become part of the rest of the teaching community. NEP 2020 recognizes the necessity of instructors who are highly trained and have experience in the industry and professional development. It enhances partnership between schools and the workers in the industry, so that the education of skills pertains to the current needs, updated and associated with the real life needs.

Moreover, NPE 1986 lacked a robust evaluation and certification system on skill training. Methods used in evaluation were usually not standardized nationally and were really uneven. NEP 2020 provides multiple systemic assessment systems, which will be upheld by such institutions as PARAKH and are designed to measure higher-order skills, applied potentials, and those acquired through

experience. This competency-based and standardized test improves the authenticity and identification of the skill qualifications.

Equity wise, NPE 1986 was to counter the imbalances by improving vocational education among the marginalized groups but this was limited and lacked perception across the society. NEP 2020 is more accommodative through incorporating the skill education as part of the mainstream system so that everyone irrespective of their socio-economic status can access quality opportunities of attaining skills. Through the connection of skills to local contexts, crafts, and indigenous knowledge, NEP 2020 encourages the cultural relevance and company involvement as well.

The distinction between the skills training in NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 is an indicator of a fundamental change in the philosophy of education. Where NPE 1986 looked at skill education as a more marginal and poorly integrated segment of the professional focus to achieve more specific vocational outcomes, NEP 2020 shows skills education as a more central and integrated driver, a contributor to whole person development, employability, and innovation. The move towards a more broad-based vocational approach to an integrated skill ecosystem brings the attention of the changing economic conditions, technological improvements, and labor market demands in the world economy to the attention of India. Skill education within NEP 2020 does not only entail preparation towards employment, but it entails enabling learners to manage in an uncertain and changing world by giving them the necessary competencies to manage jobs effectively.

Conclusion

The skill education comparative analysis between the National Policy on Education 1986 and National Education Policy 2020 demonstrates the consistency of the intent and the change of the approach. Although the two policies acknowledge skill training as a crucial tool in national development, employability, as well as social empowerment, the approach, the scope, and implementation of the policies is in line with the socio-economic changes that existed during their development. The parallels in the two policies show that the Indian state had a long-term orientation to interconnecting education with labour, encouraging vocational education and limiting it, inclusiveness, and national growth by means of the development of skills. These common values evoke the belief that over the ages, there was a firm conviction that education should not just be mere theory but must serve significant purpose to personal and social development.

Simultaneously, the differences indicate the major paradigm shift in the perception of skill education. NPE 1986 did not view skill development as a goal in itself in the education system but rather considered it as an alternative and in most cases a second route. By contrast NEP 2020 also reinvests in the skills education as the in-built and integrated part of the learning at all the levels and focuses on flexibility, multidisciplinary exposure, technological integration and lifelong learning. The shift between a compartmentalized and job-specific model and the holistic, learner-centered, and future-ready skill ecosystem can be understood as the reaction of India to globalization, digitalization, and any changes in the labor market.

In general, NEP 2020 follows the same principle of basing on the original ideas established in NPE 1986 but, at the same time, covers its shortcomings and broadens its perspectives. The comparative analysis emphasizes the fact that in India skill education has ceased being a fringe benefit system and is now being placed as a centerpiece of educational change. This evolution is very important to a policymaker, educator, and stakeholder in order to facilitate proper execution and constant enhancement. When effectively implemented, the vision of skill education identified in NEP 2020 can change the demographic advantage of India into a skilled, flexible workforce that is able to compete in the global market.

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