



## Changing perspective and major issues in the Indian Education System

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### Abstract

This paper examines the historical development and changes of the Indian education system, which can be divided into five major phases. These are the ancient education period, the Buddhist educational period, the Islamic system of education, the British colonial system of education and the modern educational system. The ancient education period was the most significant period in the history of India. Which gives more importance to religion and culture, and its main aim was overall development of individuals' physical, mental, moral, and spiritual aspects. During the Buddhist system of education, different great universities like Nalanda, Takshila, Vikramashilaa and Vallabhi became world famous and welcomed scholars and learners from different parts of India and abroad. In the Islamic period, there are two hubs of education: one is maktab education, which provides primary education, and the other is madrasa, which provides higher education, and both disseminate Islamic knowledge and moral values. The British education system in India during the colonial period, Lord Macaulay (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854), was important for the Western system with English as a medium of instruction. Both are provided importance to arts and humanities rather than science and technology. The modern educational system became developed after the independence and influence of the RTE Act 2009 and NEP 2020. The crucial aim is to develop critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity in the learner. This paper also aims to examine initiatives like the national education policy. NEP2020 reflects changing perspectives in Indian education.

**Keywords:** Ancient education, buddhist universities, islamic maktab–madrasa, british colonial education, modern system, RTE 2009, NEP 2020

### Introduction

According to Nelson Mandela "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Truly education is the most crucial part for the social change, economic growth, cultural preservation, human development and national progress. Over the year it has undergone many changes reflecting the needs and demand of the several stages. In our gurukul ancient period, holistic development of the students plays a important role. In Buddhist learning system of India. There were different viharas exist. And different scholars and learners from overall India and abroad come to viharas and acquire knowledge. In Islamic system of education two learning system are existed. One is maktab for primary education and madrasa for Higher education. In British education system English was the compulsory subject and it was the method of education.

In the modern system of education, it plays a significant role in providing a tool for holistic development, innovation and empowerment. And NEP 2020 is the best education policy for developing critical thinking skills, problem-solving ability, vocational training, digital literacy and creativity among students. The changing perspective emphasizes the idea that education must prepare students not only for jobs but also for their lives in the changing global context. At the right time, major issues come to create barriers in the Indian education system, such as lack of equal access. Especially socially and economically backward sections of society face several problems due to poverty, social inequalities and lack of infrastructure. The unequal availability of technology was especially shown during the Covid-19 pandemic, which deteriorated existing disparities in Education. Outdated curriculum and an exam-centric approach create another issue which discourages students from rote memorization.

The pressure of competitive examinations creates further different psychological problems like phobia and stress among students.

In addition, there are problems like lack of quality education and employment issues. A number of students graduate every year, and they face challenges for employment because the education system fails to match employment requirements. Shortages of teachers are creating a major issue in the present educational system. Which is continued in effect in the educational system of India. Thus, the Indian educational system stands at a decisive stage of transition. The focus is moving from basic literacy to a system that promotes inclusivity and skills based on critical thinking skills, problem-solving ability and innovation. If problems like unemployment, outdated curriculum, rigid examination, old teaching methods and inequality are not solved, then education will not achieve its real purpose of social change. The destiny of India will depend on how the educational system unites inclusivity and maintains equity with excellence, which combines traditional education with modern innovation and a path toward inclusivity.

### Historical background of the Indian education system

When we analyses the chapter of the Indian education system that time, we explore the four stages of the education system, such as

#### Ancient education system

Ancient Indian education is one of the oldest systems of education in the world and was based on Vedic cultures and traditions. At that time education was mainly given in Gurukulas. Where students (shishya) lived with the teachers (gurus) and learnt through direct contact with them. Reading and writing were not only the aim of education but also to

build moral values and character development of students. In this time students studied subjects like the Vedas, Upanishads, philosophy, grammar, logic, mathematics, astronomy, Ayurveda, arts and warfare. Gurus mainly took examinations from students through oral methods. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikram Shila became famous learning centers and attracted students from across India and abroad. Holistic development, practical knowledge and spiritual growth are the main objectives of the gurukul system. But education was not for all. It was only limited to higher-class and lower-caste people excluded from this system, except for a few like Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala and Ghose.

### Mediaeval period of education

The mediaeval period of the education system in India was run during Islamic rule. At that time many Maktabas (primary education) and Madrasas (higher education) were set up. Students learn different subjects like Persian, religion, law, history, mathematics, philosophy and medicine. This education builds students to be scholars, administrators, and judges for the royal courts. Delhi, Lucknow, Ajmer, and Jaunpur were the crucial centers for learning. Religion and the practical aspect of education were important aspects for administration as well as the spiritual knowledge of people. Alongside, the ancient gurukul system and traditional paths also were run to teach religious education like Sanskrit, Vedas, philosophy and literature. This period is a combined mix of Indian and Islamic traditions, which impacts the Indian language and literature of many centuries. Maktabas were the elementary education centers usually attached to mosques. Which taught children the Quran, simple arithmetic and simple reading and writing. Whose main purpose is to provide religious education to students. Madrasas were higher learning centres. These institutions provide education in subjects like Arabic, Persian, Islamic law, philosophy, literature, history, mathematics and astronomy. The students who trained in Madrasas often became scholars, administrators, teachers and judges in royal courts. Kings and wealthy merchants were controlled and supported by these institutions. At that time in Delhi, Lucknow, Ajmer and Jaunpur, established madrasa centres of knowledge.

### Pre-independence educational development in India

Before independence, the Indian educational system was mainly shaped by British rule. At that time there was a debate between orientalists and Anglicists. Orientalists wanted education in the Sanskrit and Persian languages, whereas Anglicists wanted to provide education in the English language. According to Macaulay's minutes (1835), English became the medium of education. During 1854, on the recommendation of Woods' despatch, three universities were established on the structure of London. The main purpose is not to teach everyone but to train a small group and provide work like clerks and officials in government offices. During 1882, the Hunter Commission came, which stressed that primary education should be given in the mother tongue and also stated that resources, accessibility and practicality should be focused on abundantly. After the Sadler Commission came in 1917, which specially studied the problem of Indian universities. Especially Calcutta University. So, this commission is also known as the Calcutta University Commission. During 1929, the Hartog Committee came, which gave special importance to wastage and stagnation of primary education.

### Post-independence India

After India got independence in 1947, education was recognized as an important instrument for nation building, social transformation and a step toward modernization. Due to widespread illiteracy, regional imbalance and poor quality in education. This leads to the government setting up several committees and commissions to overcome this problem.

### Contribution of educational commission

#### 1. University Education Commission

The first commission after the independence was the university education commission in 1948, chaired by Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The main recommendation of this commission is to focus on quality in education. It has given importance to curriculum balance and vocational education. Science, humanities and research. This commission promotes moral development, ethical values and national development among students of university level. It gives importance to teacher training for getting acquainted with the new educational scenario.

#### Secondary education commission

The 2nd education commission after independence is known as the Secondary education Commission in 1952 by Dr Laxmanswami Mudaliar. So, it is also called the Mudaliar Commission. This commission advises two stages of education – one is junior secondary from class 6 to 8 and the other is senior secondary from 9 to 11. The main aim of education is to instil democratic values, character development and social responsibility among students. This commission gives special attention to curriculum reforms, teacher training, guidance and counselling, women's education, administration and examination reforms, etc.

#### Kothari commission

The Kothari Commission was the most comprehensive education commission, chaired by Dr D. S. Kothari in 1964-66. It is also called the Indian Education Commission after independence. National development among students is the main aim of this commission. The structure of education was 10+2+3, which indicates 10 years of general education, 2 years of higher secondary education and 3 years of university education. A three-language formula which includes mother tongue, English and Hindi. This commission places special importance on free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. Teacher education and professional development are one of the important aspects of this commission. Also recommended is allocating up to 6% of GDP to the educational sector. At that time different national policies also came and suggested some significant recommendations.

#### National education policy (1968)

The national education policy 1968 was the first policy of education after the independence of India. Which was governed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This policy is the large version of the Kothari Commission (1964-66). NEP 1968 specifically provided a strong foundation for building national development among students. It emphasises the common school system, the 10+2+3 structure, and the three-language formula and also stresses science and technology development and moral values.

### **National policy on education (1986)**

The second national policy on education, 1986, is the most influential policy given by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The main purpose of the policy is national development and economic growth through education. Also aimed to provide free and compulsory education up to 6 to 14 years of age. Other important recommendations are included: Navodaya Vidyalaya, early childhood care education, encouraging the three-language formula, vocational education, teacher training, Operation Blackboard, professional development, and also recommending spending 6% of GDP on education.

### **National Education Policy (2020)**

The National Education Policy 2020 is the most comprehensive policy among other policies. Which was implemented in 2020 by the prime minister, Narendra Modi. The main purpose of NEP 2020 is to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, vocational skills and multidisciplinary education among students. This policy has improved by bringing some recommendations at every stage. In education, the 5+3+3+4 structure has been implemented where 5 years are for preschool to grades I and II, 3 years are for grades III, IV and V, again 3 years are for grades VI, VII and VIII, and 4 years are for secondary education, which grades are IX, X, XI and XII. This policy recommends a flexible curriculum and reduced rote memorization to promote critical thinking skills. The mother tongue is to be the medium of instruction till grade V. In the higher education sector, the most crucial aspect is to develop research, innovation and best practices. Introduction of holistic education in the higher education sector. In 4-year undergraduate courses, multiple entry and exit facilities are there. After one year, a complete certificate has been provided; after two years, a complete diploma; after three years, a bachelor's degree; and after four years, a bachelor's degree with research has been awarded to students. On the other hand, this policy has given special importance to the continuous professional development of teachers. By 2030 the minimum qualification for the teaching post will be a 4-year integrated B. Ed degree. And lastly, special emphasis was placed on adult education, lifelong learning, equity, inclusion and disadvantaged groups, and also focused on basic literacy and numeracy. The students should have developed different skills, like cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills. Along with this, 360° assessment includes self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment.

### **Challenges in modern education system in India**

#### **1. quality of education**

One of the major challenges in the modern Indian education system is the poor quality of education, especially in government schools and many private institutions. While enrollment rates have increased, learning outcomes remain low. The system emphasizes only rote memorization rather than critical thinking, creativity, or problem-solving. Outdated curricula and lack of modern teaching methods make students less prepared for real-life challenges and the job market.

#### **2. Infrastructure gap**

A major obstacle in educational system in India is the lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly in rural and government schools. Many schools still do not have basic facilities such as proper classrooms, clean drinking water,

separate toilets for boys and girls, libraries, science laboratories, playgrounds, and digital equipment mainly rural areas. This not only affects attendance but also the overall learning environment and quality of education.

#### **3. Teacher related issues**

Teachers are the backbone of the education system, but India faces serious challenges in this area. Many schools, especially in rural regions, suffer from a shortage of trained and qualified teachers. Even where teachers are available, problems such as lack of motivation, poor training, low salaries, and absenteeism affect the quality of teaching. Continuous professional development and use of modern teaching methods are also limited, which reduces students' learning outcomes.

#### **4. Funding and resource constraints**

One of the most present challenges in India's education system is inadequate funding. Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommends raising public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP, India still spends only around 3% of GDP. This funding gap directly impacts infrastructure development, teacher recruitment, research facilities, and access to quality education in both rural and urban areas. Limited resources also make it difficult to implement large-scale reforms such as digital learning, vocational training, and expansion of higher education.

#### **5. Federal coordination and policy alignment**

Education in India coming under the Concurrent List, meaning both the Union and state governments share responsibility. This often leads challenges in policy alignment and coordination. While national reforms like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 set ambitious goals, their actual implementation depends on how individual states adopt and adapt these policies. Differences in priorities, resources, and political will across states lead to uneven progress. This weakens uniformity in curriculum, teacher training, and digital initiatives, making it harder to achieve nationwide educational transformation.

#### **6. vocational education leads to risk of early streaming**

If vocational education (as proposed in NEP 2020 from Class 6 onwards) is not handled flexibly, students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be pushed disproportionately into vocational streams, while wealthier students continue in academic tracks. These risks reinforcing social and class divisions, where vocational courses may be seen as "second-class education."

#### **7. language policy**

Language has been a sensitive issue in India's education system because of diverse language. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes that the mother tongue or regional language should be the medium of instruction till at least Grade 5, challenges arise in implementation. On one side, promoting local languages can improve understanding and cultural identity; on the other, the dominance of English in higher education, jobs, and global opportunities creates pressure on parents to prefer English-medium schools. Balancing equity, accessibility, and employability makes language policy one of the toughest challenges. For instance, three-language formula has faced strong resistance in states like Tamil Nadu, which

opposes compulsory Hindi, fearing it will undermine Tamil. At the same time, rural students studying in regional languages often struggle in competitive exams and higher education, where English is the primary medium. This reflects the deep divide caused by language in India's education system.

### 8. Technology and infrastructure shortfall in education

India's education system faces a dual challenge of infrastructure gaps and technological limitations. Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, playgrounds, clean drinking water, and separate toilets for girls. Alongside this, the digital divide is widening; while policies like the NEP 2020 emphasize digital learning, large sections of students lack access to computers, internet, and smart classrooms. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these inequalities sharply, with millions of children unable to attend online classes due to poor connectivity and lack of devices.

### 9. Regulatory delay

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes major structural reforms in higher education governance, including the creation of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to replace existing bodies like the UGC and AICTE. However, these reforms have faced regulatory delays in approval and implementation. As a result, universities and colleges continue to function under outdated regulatory structures, slowing the pace of curriculum changes, academic flexibility, and quality assurance promised by NEP. Such delays create uncertainty for institutions and make it difficult to achieve the target of holistic, multidisciplinary education by 2030.

### 10. Implementation gaps

While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 lays out a visionary roadmap for transforming India's education system, the real challenge lies in implementation. Many reforms—such as vocational education from Class 6, holistic report cards, digital learning platforms, and multidisciplinary universities—remain largely on paper in several states. Issues like shortage of funds, lack of trained teachers, uneven state-level adoption, and bureaucratic delays have created wide gaps between policy and practice. Without strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms, the ambitious goals of NEP risk being delayed.

### Suggestions

Although India has the largest education system in the world, it still faces several shortcomings, like a rigid curriculum, limited access, insufficient trained teachers and a lack of skill orientation. To overcome these problems and improve the quality of education, several suggestions are required:

The teaching-learning process should be research-orientated, skillful, and practical in nature. An introduced multidisciplinary and flexible curriculum promotes critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and vocational skills among students by using modern pedagogical tools and ICT materials. The education system should provide special support for marginalized groups, girls and disabled persons. That's why it provides special equipment and facilities like scholarships, midday meals, free textbooks and other transport facilities. A flexible curriculum and a well-suited examination should be conducted. From time to time provide

training to teachers and organize seminars, workshops, and webinars for their professional development. If the government will place special importance on this suggestion, then we can develop our Indian education system abundantly.

### Conclusion

The changing perspective of the Indian education system transforms a shift from rote memorization and exam-orientated study into a more practical, holistic, skill-orientated and student-centered approach. The national education policy is more focused on innovation, inclusivity, digital literacy, problem-solving ability, employability and critical thinking skills. This change aims to balance traditional knowledge with modern global needs, which ensures the students not only excel academically but also focus on life skills to meet future challenges. The main goal is to establish a holistic, equitable, modern and dynamic education system that enables the students to actively develop the society and compete in a global scenario.

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