

Bridging Education and Sustainability: The Role of NEP 2020 in Advancing SDGs

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that focus on enhancing the value addition across the education system. The present study highlights the prospects of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to advance sustainable development. It is a paradigm change in the Indian education system as it encourages holistic and multidisciplinary learning that is aligned with global sustainable development goals (SDGs). The policy aids in the development of skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and care for the environment through the inclusion of vocational literacy, skill competence, and curriculum focused on sustainability. The review brings together evidence from scholarly papers, policy reports, and global publications to evaluate the success of NEP 2020 in tackling SDG goals, specifically SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 13. This article also discusses how the policy has the capacity to create behavioral change, community participation, and employability in sustainable industries. It also raises challenges, gaps and shortfalls that may hinder successful implementation. The research shows that to construct a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future aligning education reform with sustainability goals is of urgent importance. Infrastructural gaps, limited funds, and unequal implementation are the ongoing hindrances especially in rural and marginalized contexts that are serious hurdles for hurdle free implementation of this policy. The review concludes that NEP 2020 could be a catalyst for attainment of various SDGs that will re-shape India as a sustainable, inclusive, and knowledge-based society.

Keywords— NEP-2020, Sustainable Development Goals, Quality Education, Higher Education Reforms, Inclusive & Equitable Education, Skill Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian economy, being amongst the top five wealthy nations across the globe with a majority of population in the age of learning, needs major reforms in its education system. NEP 2020 is a paradigm shift towards the same that will not only assist in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The present study is an attempt to highlight the important characteristics of NEP to identify relevant research and scope for future studies. The NEP 2020 is focused on technology-based learning and inter-disciplinary strategies to develop competent citizens and foster comprehensive

development (Maharaj et al., 2021; Sachin & Ramesh, 2022). The policy attempts to renew and restructure the education system in line with the objectives of 21st-century education, such as SDG4, drawing strengths from India's values and traditions. The emphasis of the policy on India-centric education, including the country's heritage, history, culture, and values, is intended to inculcate national pride and cooperation (Malik, 2021). The review in this paper analyses the multifaceted role of NEP 2020 towards attaining sustainable development in different sectors by emphasizing integration of technology,

multidisciplinary education, and Indian ethos and values. The NEP 2020, which came into force in July 2020, seeks to restructure the country's education pyramid by leading a new paradigm for primary, secondary, and higher education, setting aside the archaic education system and enhancing the quality of the content as well as its dissemination (Jha et al., 2020). The policy tackles most impactful issues like fiscal concerns, evergreen gaps in educational infrastructures opening up for in-depth educational reform. Indian education has to transition from memorization to critical thought, problem-solving, innovations, and flexibility. Access to quality education for all is significant for the development of India, and NEP 2020 has been devised to make full use of the talent and resources of the nation. The policy also recommends that it is important to include Indian heritage, traditions, customs, and values to foster patriotism and national integration. This holistic strategy contributes towards development of profound respect for constitutional values, fundamental duties, and national integration by making India a just and vibrant knowledge society. NEP 2020 recognizes education as one of the significant instruments that assist in channeling people's abilities in productive channels and empower them to lead a dignified life in a civilized society.

a.)-Background of NEP 2020:

The NEP was initiated at the behest of the Indian Government in July 2020 and it is the first major overhaul in the Indian education system. It is based upon five pillars: **access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability**, in order to ensure a universal access to quality education (Jha et al., 2020). It aims to transform education into an equitable, inclusive, and multidisciplinary framework lined with the needs of the 21st century and the visions of Sustainable Development Goals, mainly SDG 4 (Quality Education). With the emphasis on early childhood care and education (ECCE), foundational literacy and numeracy, and holistic, flexible curricula that promotes critical thinking, creativity, and experiential learning NEP 2020 introduces a new 5+3+3+4 curricular framework reshaping the entire educational structure. It also aims to reach a 100% gross enrolment ratio in school education by 2030 and a 50% gross enrolment ratio in higher education by 2035 (Dhameja, 2021). The policy also gives priority to skill development, digital literacy, teacher empowerment, and multilingualism by recognizing education as a key driver of social equity and economic growth. NEP 2020 also envisions the creation of a future-ready workforce having the

potential to address global challenges and advancing India's commitments to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the promotion of research, innovations, and value-based education.

b.)-Overview of Sustainable Development Goals:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015 are a part of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They consist of 17 interconnected goals and 169 targets aimed at tackling global issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and climate change along with supporting peace, prosperity, and well-being for all. Education, outlined in SDG 4 (Quality Education) suggests that it is essential in accomplishing the broader SDG agenda because it provides individuals the values, skills, and knowledge needed to improve his individual status thus, promoting sustainable development across all sectors.

c.)- Linking NEP 2020 and SDGs:

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is closely related with the SDGs, notably SDG 4, by focussing on inclusive, equitable, and quality education and fostering lifelong learning opportunities. This policy considers education as a catalyst for achieving other goals, including gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and climate action (SDG 13) by focussing on multidisciplinary learning, skill development, environmental awareness, and global citizenship. Thus, NEP 2020 envisions education as both a driver and enabler of sustainable development in India.

Despite the proliferation of studies on NEP 2020 and its role in educational reforms there are still some potential research gaps related to this policy. There is a need for research on the practical challenges and barriers to implementing NEP 2020, especially in diverse socio-economic contexts. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of holistic, inquiry-based, and discovery-based learning approaches on students' overall development and mental health. Further research is needed to assess how NEP 2020 addresses equity and inclusion in education, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the long-term impact of NEP 2020 on various aspects of education.

To address these research gaps, the present study conducts a comprehensive review of various literatures related to NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goals and how this policy is acting like a catalyst to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within a

specified time frame. The key objectives of this study are:

- 1.To analyze how the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 contributes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through holistic, multidisciplinary, and experiential learning approaches.
- 2.To examine the policy's role in addressing critical global challenges via curriculum integration, pedagogical innovation, and the promotion of responsible citizenship.
- 3.To evaluate NEP 2020's emphasis on environmental awareness, global citizenship, and skill development in aligning educational outcomes with sustainable development objectives.
- 4.To assess the policy's strategies for promoting inclusive and equitable education, particularly for marginalized and underrepresented communities.
- 5.To investigate NEP 2020's initiatives in leveraging digital education and technological innovations to bridge the digital divide and enhance educational access.

With the help of comprehensive review method critical analysis of relevant literature this study helps in understanding the visions, key areas and strengths of NEP 2020, providing an insight about the various challenges faced in its implementation along with the adaptive strategies that are required to align it effectively with the SDGs.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review on NEP 2020 and SDGs. The research methodology is explained in the Section III and Section IV includes the findings and results of the study. Section V emphasizes on the various challenges faced in the implementation of NEP 2020 along with the opportunities. Finally section VI concludes the study with Future Recommendations in section discussed in Section VII.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

NEP 2020 seeks to ensure that all students are school-ready when they enter Grade 1, with a focus on physical, motor, cognitive, socio-emotional-ethical development, communication, early language, and numeracy (Choudhury et al., 2023). The NEP 2020 strives to redress imbalances and eliminate barriers to infrastructure, resources, and communication, empowering the rural youth to realize their potential and create context-appropriate programs (Kanjilal et al.,

2022). The policy recognizes the importance of leveraging technology's advantages while addressing potential risks, calling for pilot studies to determine how online education benefits can be maximized (Beerannavar & Pancrasius, 2024). Education 5.0 can significantly improve educational systems in emerging economies by integrating ICT with core skills development, preparing a workforce ready to drive sustainable development globally (Agarwal et al., n.d.). Education 5.0 aligns with these goals by promoting learning, literacy, and essential life skills, addressing the need for upskilling and reskilling initiatives. Given the digital divide, NEP 2020 implementation needs to overcome infrastructural gaps and provide adequate teacher training, especially in rural areas, to ensure effective resource allocation and capacity building (Ramteke, 2024). The policy promotes multidisciplinary education and the integration of subjects, which may lead to a deeper understanding of sustainability issues and their interconnections (Beerannavar & Pancrasius, 2024). This interdisciplinary approach is vital for creating a generation of problem-solvers and innovators who can address the complex challenges of sustainable development (Al-Kuwari et al., 2021). By emphasizing modern-day pedagogies, innovation skills, and ICT integration, educational institutions can provide equal access and opportunities to students, aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (Tolentino et al., 2020).

Learning environments should be developed for sustainability, and schools need to nurture collective skills and knowledge (Alex, 2021). Incorporating SDGs into the curriculum necessitates systemic thinking, interdisciplinary approaches, and pedagogical innovations that provide interactive, experiential, transformative, and real-world learning (González-Salamanca et al., 2020). The UN promotes the use of ICT to support Education for Sustainable Development, which can help achieve these objectives (Lorenzo & Sánchez-Martínez, 2022). Advancement in education involves training students to make informed decisions and adopt responsible measures that favor environmental integrity and economic viability (González-Zamar et al., 2020). Environmental education practices play a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly target 4.7, which emphasizes ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles (Velempini, 2025). Sustainable education requires rethinking the purpose, methods, and outcomes of education,

transforming educational institutions, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders (Lin et al., 2023). Education for Sustainable Development necessitates specific knowledge, competencies, and the alignment of pedagogical practices (Guo et al., 2024). According to UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development equips learners with the skills and knowledge to tackle global issues like climate change and inequality (Huang et al., 2024).

NEP 2020 recognizes education as the most powerful tool for achieving social justice and equality, and it seeks to create an inclusive and equitable society where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the nation. It integrates global themes into the curriculum and teaching methodologies to foster critical awareness of global challenges and encourage learners to consider diverse perspectives. There is a need for high-quality evidence regarding learning to enhance understanding of global citizenship and sustainable development.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine existing research trends and scholarly work related to the alignment of the NEP 2020 with the SDGs, this study employs a review method to analyse various relevant literatures from significant sources like, Scopus, Google Scholar, or institutional repositories. The review helps in identifying the key areas where NEP 2020 helps in achieving the SDGs, such as quality education, reduced inequalities, and sustainable economic growth. It synthesizes Qualitative and quantitative data from the selected studies to provide a detailed picture of the state of the field.

Search Strategy: The search strategy uses a combination of keywords related to education policy, sustainable development, and specific targets outlined in the SDGs. Then, the selected publications underwent a strict screening process based on predefined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality. The primary database used here for identifying relevant publications, using terms like "NEP 2020," "SDG 4," and "Education

for Sustainable Development" were Scopus, Google Scholars. The search was restricted to peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and research reports published between 2020 and 2025 to include the most current and relevant studies. The search was further refined using Boolean operators such as "AND" and "OR" to extend the reach of the study and catch a wide range of opinions on the juncture of education and sustainable development. Grey literature, including government reports and organizational publications, were also consulted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy implementation and its impact. The initial search yielded a substantial number of articles, which were then screened based on relevance to the research questions, focusing on studies that provided empirical evidence or theoretical insights into the role of NEP 2020 in advancing the SDGs. The selected articles were analyzed using a combination of content analysis and thematic synthesis to identify recurring themes and patterns.. The use of secondary data from global and national policy documents offers insights into the data analysis, particularly in the context of online and blended higher education. So, the search strategy was comprehensive, aiming to identify all peer-reviewed articles presenting interventions related to sustainable development goals and ensuring a systematic and transparent approach to assess the alignment between educational reforms and sustainable development objectives.

IV. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The review critically assesses the identified research, evaluating various research methodologies, findings, and conclusions to provide a balanced and evidence-based synthesis of the role of NEP 2020 in achieving the SDGs. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are used to analyse the policy's effectiveness in achieving SDG targets and to make necessary adjustments. This study considers both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic assessment. The review also identifies and examines the challenges and priorities in achieving sustainable development goals.

Table 1: NEP 2020 and its Contribution to SDGs

NEP 2020 Initiative	Relevant SDG(s)	Contribution to SDGs
Universal access & foundational literacy/numeracy (FLN)	SDG 4.1, 4.2	Ensures all children have access to quality early childhood care and education.
Holistic, multidisciplinary & experiential learning	SDG 4.7, SDG 3, SDG 13	Develops critical thinking, socio-emotional skills, and awareness of sustainability.

Inclusive & equitable education for marginalized groups	SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 4.5	Reduces gender and social disparities in education, ensuring equal opportunities.
Integration of ICT & digital literacy	SDG 4.4, SDG 9	Bridges digital divide, improves access to online learning, and builds digital skills.
Environmental & sustainability education	SDG 4.7, SDG 13, SDG 15	Promotes environmental awareness, conservation, and climate action through curriculum.
Vocational education & skill development	SDG 8, SDG 9	Prepares workforce with 21st-century skills, enhancing employability and innovation.
Promotion of Indian knowledge systems & multilingualism	SDG 4.7, SDG 16	Fosters cultural awareness, respect for diversity, and global citizenship.
Teacher training & capacity building	SDG 4.c	Strengthens teacher quality and pedagogical innovation for improved learning outcomes.
Assessment reforms & flexible learning pathways	SDG 4.3, 4.4	Encourages lifelong learning, vocational mobility, and competency-based education.
Focus on research, innovation & higher education	SDG 9, SDG 17	Promotes R&D, innovation, and partnerships for sustainable development.

The findings of the study mainly focus on the key features of NEP 2020 and its alignment with India's educational ecosystem with global sustainability goals, particularly SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 10, SDG 16 and SDG 17. Table 1, gives an overview of the various NEP 2020 initiatives and its contribution in achieving goals of Sustainable Development. So, by emphasizing modern-day pedagogies, innovation skills, ICT integration, R&D innovations, and cultural awareness, NEP 2020 is empowering the future by aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Incorporating SDGs into the curriculum necessitates systemic thinking, interdisciplinary approaches, and pedagogical innovations that provide interactive, experiential, transformative, and real-world learning.

V. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

NEP 2020 is a very comprehensive policy but still faces challenges in implementation and requires adaptive strategies to align effectively with the SDGs. The policy's success hinges on overcoming these challenges and leveraging opportunities to create a transformative and sustainable education system that contributes to achieving the SDGs. Effective implementation strategies, resource allocation, and capacity building are helpful to tackle these challenges. It is very crucial to analyse the impact of NEP 2020 on academic performance, cognitive development, and stakeholder engagement because these factors significantly influence the attainment of sustainable development goals.

A-Implementation Challenges: The effective implementation of NEP 2020 can be hindered by political and religious disagreements, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of competent teachers. Political and religious differences can also impede the consensus needed for effective policy implementation. Furthermore, socio-political factors, such as cultural restrictions, can also contribute to the difficulties associated with policy implementation. So, to address these challenges it is required to increase educational funding, encourage teacher development programs, reduce political and religious interference in education and promote innovative solutions to overcome infrastructural constraints.

B-Financial Constraints: The allocation of sufficient funds to support the various initiatives outlined in NEP 2020 is vital for its success. Addressing budgeting restrictions demands developing innovative funding mechanisms, utilising public-private partnerships, and prioritizing investments in essential areas such as teacher training and infrastructure development. To strengthen the financial stability of educational institutions it becomes important to have an effective financial system.

C-Resistance to Change: The adoption of NEP 2020 may be hampered by opposition from stakeholders, including administrators, teachers and parents. In order to overcome this resistance, effective communication between parents, teachers and management, stakeholder engagement, and the demonstration of the

policy's benefits through pilot projects and success stories are required. Active involvement of stakeholders, as well as robust communication and feedback mechanisms would be very helpful in its successful implementation.

D-Need for Capacity Building: Implementation of NEP 2020 effectively requires substantial capacity building of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders as this will ensure that they are fully prepared to implement the policy's reforms effectively. It involves providing training programs, resources, and support systems to facilitate the adoption of new pedagogies, technologies, and assessment techniques. Teacher's readiness is a critical factor that greatly affects the successful roll-out of curriculum changes and should be given due consideration.

E-Opportunities for Innovation and Collaboration: Opportunities for innovation in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment, as well as for collaboration among educational institutions, industry, and other stakeholders are presented by NEP 2020. These opportunities can be used to prepare an education system that is more relevant, engaging and effective for students by guiding them for opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. These kinds of partnerships can enhance multidisciplinary thinking and give learners hands-on, real-world experiences which will enhance their employability and social impact.

VI. CONCLUSION

As a result, the NEP 2020 signifies a paradigm shift in India's educational landscape and has a great potential for advancing the SDGs by promoting experiential, holistic and interdisciplinary learning. The NEP 2020 fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It aligns education with the needs of a rapidly changing world and various goals of Sustainable Development. By modernising the education structure and bringing it in line with the 21st-century learning goals including SDG4, SDG8, SDG10 the policy addresses the developmental needs of India.

Additionally, it also works to raise the quality of education and promote skills development and innovation. By empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are needed to be decisive and responsible, NEP 2020 also promotes environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society, while honouring cultural diversity. The policy's emphasis on technology-driven learning and the

utilization of e-learning platforms further supports the achievement of these goals. It highlights how crucial environmental education practices are in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and guaranteeing that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. The integration of goals of Sustainable Development in the NEP 2020 has a beneficial effect on the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education in India.

VII. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to evaluate the long-term impact of NEP 2020 on the accomplishment of SDGs, future research should concentrate on creating robust evaluation frameworks and carrying out long-term studies. To get comprehensive data quantitatively as well as qualitatively these studies should employ mixed-methods approaches that will provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Such research will provide evidence-based policymaking and contribute to the improvement of educational strategies, ensuring that they are aligned with global sustainability goals. Furthermore, there is a need to explore how education for sustainable development can be effectively integrated into the curriculum to help students with the knowledge, competencies and values required to address complex social, environmental, and economic challenges. By incorporating sustainability actions into research, teaching, campus management and community outreach HEIs can significantly improve the sustainability landscape.

a)-Policy Recommendations:- Policymakers should give priority to investments in teacher training and professional development to ensure that educators are equipped with the required proficiencies and knowledge to implement NEP 2020 effectively and promote sustainable development.

b)-Areas for Further Research:- More studies are required in the area to explore the potential of digital technologies in supporting education for sustainable development and to identify practical strategies for reducing the digital divide, ensuring equitable access to technology and digital literacy skills for all students

c) Collaboration of Stakeholders- It is important for stakeholders across different sectors to collaborate and work together to prioritize education and sustainability. This will ensure that every learner gains the knowledge and skills necessary for a sustainable future.

Thus, NEP 2020 is a well-structured policy that aims to revolutionize India's education system by enhancing cognitive skills and promoting holistic development among students. The policy aims to align educational practices with constitutional values, ensuring that the education system promotes equity, justice, and social harmony thus fostering the goals and agendas of United Nation Sustainability Development.

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