Policy on Higher Education: A Comparison of NEP 2020 With NPE 1986 and NPE 1968

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ABSTRACT: Higher education is the post-secondary phase of education, offering specialized and advanced academic programs in various fields. It is crucial for career advancement and contributes to research and innovation. Higher education promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and personal growth by encouraging exploration and exposing individuals to diverse cultures and viewpoints.

India's higher education system has a rich history dating back to ancient times, with institutions like Nalanda and Vikramashila attracting scholars and students from Asia. The colonial period introduced Western-style universities, while post-independence (1947) saw the establishment of Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management. The 1990s saw economic liberalization in India, leading to a surge of private universities and enhanced collaboration between Indian and foreign institutions. Recent years have seen a renewed commitment to improving the quality of higher education in India, addressing issues of access, affordability, and curriculum relevance. Today, India's higher education landscape is vast and diverse, featuring numerous universities, colleges, and specialized institutions offering a wide array of programs. Comparing various educational policies of the Indian government since independence, particularly in the context of higher education, helps understand the evolution and challenges within the system.

KEYWORDS: NPE 1968, NPE 1986, NEP 2020, Higher Education.

HIGHER EDUCATION:

Higher education constitutes advanced learning that follows the completion of secondary or high school education. It encompasses various institutions, including colleges, universities, vocational schools, and professional training centers, which provide specialized and advanced academic programs. Notable features of higher education encompass in-depth knowledge acquisition, diverse fields of study, and the availability of degree programs, such as bachelors', masters', and doctoral degrees. Career advancement forms a pivotal facet of higher education, as many professions mandate specific degrees or certifications for entry.

Universities and research institutions significantly contribute to research and innovation in diverse fields. Higher education plays a pivotal role in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and personal development by nurturing intellectual curiosity and encouraging exploration. It also underscores the importance of global perspectives, given the diverse student bodies and faculty at these institutions, thereby exposing students to a broad spectrum of cultures, viewpoints, and ideas.

Furthermore, continuing education has gained increasing prominence, with many adults returning to higher education to update their skills or pursue new interests. However, it is essential to acknowledge that higher education can be expensive and may pose accessibility challenges. As a result, it is imperative to carefully weigh the benefits of higher education against the associated costs when considering further education beyond high school.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA:

India's higher education system boasts an illustrious history that traces its origins to ancient times, prominently featuring the Gurukula system. This educational framework delivered holistic learning experiences to students, encompassing not only academic knowledge but also values and life skills. During the periods marked by the prominence of Buddhism and Jainism, renowned institutions like Nalanda and Vikramashila emerged as beacons of knowledge, magnetically attracting scholars and students from across Asia. Their role in the dissemination of Buddhist and Jain teachings was instrumental, contributing to the spread of these religions across the continent.

In the medieval era, India's educational landscape evolved further. Islamic rulers established madrasas, which focused on religious and traditional learning, while Hindu kingdoms lent their support to indigenous centers of education. This multifaceted approach to learning was indicative of India's diverse cultural and educational tapestry.

Policy on Higher Education: A Comparison of NEP 2020 With NPE 1986 and NPE 1968

The colonial period, spanning from the 17th to the 20th century, was a transformative juncture in India's educational history. British colonial powers introduced a Western model of education, which laid the foundation for the modern education system in India. The establishment of universities during this time reflected the British influence and their aspiration to impart a more structured and standardized education.

Following India's independence in 1947, the nation embarked on a journey of educational reform and expansion. New universities and institutions emerged to meet the surging demand for technical and management education. Notably, the establishment of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management reflected India's commitment to nurturing technical and managerial talents.

The 1990s ushered in a period of economic liberalization in India, fostering the proliferation of private universities and fostering greater collaboration between Indian educational institutions and foreign counterparts. This era saw the globalization of Indian education, enabling students to access international standards of learning without leaving the country.

In recent years, India has redoubled its efforts to enhance the quality of higher education, focusing on issues like accessibility, affordability, and curriculum alignment with contemporary demands. As a result, India's higher education landscape today is a sprawling and diverse ecosystem, featuring a multitude of universities, colleges, and specialized institutions offering a wide array of educational programs. This transformation mirrors India's enduring commitment to knowledge, progress, and academic excellence.

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AFTER INDEPENDENCE:

1968 (Based on The Kothari Commission's Recommendation):

In 1968, the Kothari Commission was established with the task of conducting a comprehensive evaluation of India's educational system and formulating recommendations to enhance its quality, accessibility, and relevance. The resultant report, commonly referred to as the Kothari Commission Report, left a lasting imprint on education policies in India, steering them towards crucial reforms in various domains.

The Kothari Commission's recommendations spanned a wide spectrum, touching upon pivotal areas such as the universalization of education, curriculum revitalization, examination reforms, the establishment of higher education institutions, decisions concerning the medium of instruction, and provisions for special education. One of its most noteworthy proposals was the advocacy for free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14, which eventually led to the enactment of the Right to Education Act in 2009, a landmark piece of legislation.

These recommendations had a profound and enduring impact on the landscape of education in India. They served as a cornerstone for subsequent educational reforms, including the National Policy on Education in 1986, and its revised iteration in 1992. The Kothari Commission's insights and suggestions continue to shape the trajectory of India's educational system, reinforcing the nation's commitment to enhancing the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education for all its citizens.

1986:

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 stands as a pivotal milestone in India's educational history, strategically crafted to tackle the prevailing challenges within the country's education system. This landmark policy placed significant emphasis on a multitude of critical dimensions, including the universalization of education, the advancement of vocational education, the reduction of educational disparities, the enhancement of educational quality, teacher training, curriculum modernization, science and technology education, the selection of languages of instruction, the strengthening of higher education, and the infusion of cultural and moral values into the educational fabric.

The NPE of 1986 was not a static blueprint but rather an evolving document, undergoing a notable modification in 1992, commonly referred to as the "National Policy on Education 1992." This revision responded to the dynamic educational needs and emerging challenges of the time. It aimed to furnish a comprehensive and adaptable framework for the holistic development of education in India, with a pronounced focus on universalizing both elementary and vocational education, reducing educational disparities, and fostering quality education at all levels.

Moreover, the 1992 policy renewal accentuated the significance of instilling cultural and moral values in education, recognizing their role in cultivating social responsibility and active citizenship. Thus, the NPE of 1992 carried forward the torch of educational progress in India, with an unwavering commitment to addressing the evolving educational landscape and the broader needs of the nation.

2020:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents India's most recent and all-encompassing educational policy framework, strategically designed to realize the vision of making high-quality education universally accessible across all educational levels. It places a strong emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with the objective of ensuring that every student achieves competence in these areas by the culmination of Grade 3.

A pivotal feature of this policy is its advocacy for a flexible and multidisciplinary curriculum that fosters the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Multilingual education is promoted to preserve and celebrate the rich tapestry of

Policy on Higher Education: A Comparison of NEP 2020 With NPE 1986 and NPE 1968

Indian languages and their cultural significance. The NEP 2020 envisions a shift from high-stakes board exams to competency-based assessments, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation of students' abilities and potential.

Furthermore, the policy sets its sights on the transformation of higher education institutions into multidisciplinary hubs, thereby enhancing flexibility in undergraduate education and encouraging internationalization. This transformation aims to create well-rounded graduates who are better prepared for the complexities of the global world.

The NEP 2020 underscores the importance of teacher training and professional development, the integration of technology in education, the promotion of inclusive education, regulatory reforms, and the initiation of lifelong learning and adult education programs. These initiatives seek to address the diverse needs of India's population and ensure that education remains a dynamic force for personal growth and national progress.

The implementation of NEP 2020 is poised to have a profound and lasting impact on India's education system, promising positive transformations in the years to come.

This paper attempts to compare The Educational Policies of 1968, 1986, and 2020 with regards to higher education.

1. **OBJECTIVES:**
a) **1968:** NEP 1968 aimed to expand higher education access, improve quality, promote scientific research, integrate vocational and technical education, address regional imbalances, and promote social justice by providing opportunities for marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, to improve education quality, promote research, and address regional imbalances in higher education.

b) **1986:** NEP 1986 aimed to promote universal access to quality education, reduce disparities, and enhance the quality of higher education through curricular and pedagogical reforms. It encouraged the establishment of autonomous institutions, promoted excellence in higher education and research, and recognized the need for increased resource mobilization. The policy also emphasized international collaboration in higher education, encouraging partnerships and exchange programs with foreign institutions.

c) **2020:** The NEP 2020 aims to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education by promoting multi-disciplinarity, flexibility, and research. It seeks to increase access to higher education, particularly for marginalized groups, through scholarships and financial aid. The policy emphasizes research and innovation, establishing the National Research Foundation, and promoting university research. It advocates for institutional autonomy and reduced regulatory interference, encourages internationalization through collaborations with foreign institutions, and focuses on continuous teacher training. It also emphasizes lifelong learning and promotes multiple entry and exit points in higher education.

2. **STRUCTURE:**
a) **1968:** A transformative shift in the educational system was initiated in response to the recommendations of the Education Commission. As a result, the nation embraced the 10+2+3 universal schooling structure, signifying a significant departure from the previous educational paradigm. This innovative framework delineated the progression of education into three separate stages.

The higher secondary stage, which is the second phase of this educational model, entailed a comprehensive two-year program. This stage was implemented in schools and colleges, with flexibility in its local implementation to accommodate regional needs and preferences. The purpose was to create an adaptable and accessible educational system that could cater to the diverse requirements and contexts within the country.

b) **1986:** In 1968, India's higher education system followed a three-year undergraduate degree program known as a bachelor's degree, a bachelor of arts, or a bachelor of science. The program offered a wide range of disciplines, including the Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Commerce. Students completed a three-year curriculum, including core and elective courses. Examinations assess knowledge and progress at the university level. Specialization opportunities were available in the final year, with some programs incorporating practical training. In some disciplines, students complete a research project or dissertation. Upon successful completion, students were awarded a bachelor's degree in their field. However, the educational system has evolved since 1968, with changes in program duration, professional and vocational courses, and more flexible credit-based systems.

c) **2020:** In 2020, India's higher education structure was significantly changed, offering a wider range of programs and incorporating changes and reforms. Undergraduate programs typically last three years, with some professional programs lasting four years. Postgraduate programs typically lasted two years and included master's or postgraduate programs. Doctoral programs were available for those interested in advanced research in specific fields. Some universities offer integrated programs that combine undergraduate and postgraduate study. Professional and technical courses included programs in medicine, dentistry, engineering, law, pharmacy, and architecture. Higher education was delivered through a network of universities and affiliated colleges. Curriculum and assessment patterns varied across universities, with many adopting a semester system. The Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) allows students to choose elective courses based on their interests and career goals.

Technology integration in education became widespread, and universities and research institutions played a significant role in research and development. International collaborations and quality assurance mechanisms were also implemented. Scholarships and financial aid programs support economically disadvantaged students.

3. CONTENT/COURSE:

a) **1968:** The NEP 1968 focused on a traditional, three-year undergraduate program with a strong emphasis on foundational subjects in arts, sciences, and commerce. It was discipline-centric, with limited cross-disciplinary studies. Students pursued specialized knowledge in their chosen field. The evaluation was primarily based on annual exams, emphasizing rote learning and memorization, with minimal practical or laboratory work in many programs.

b) **1986:** NEP 1986 introduced greater diversification in higher education, promoting interdisciplinary studies and a holistic approach. It aimed to reduce the emphasis on high-stake board exams and promote continuous assessment through internal assessments, projects, and practical examinations. The policy also emphasized improving the quality of higher education through faculty development and infrastructure enhancement, making it more relevant and responsive to job market needs.

c) **2020:** The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) introduced greater flexibility in higher education, allowing students to choose from a wide range of subjects and programs and encouraging multidisciplinary approaches. The policy recommended a flexible curriculum with fewer rigid boundaries, emphasizing experiential learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It emphasized vocational education and skill development, making education more employment-oriented and aligned with industry needs. The policy also encouraged competency-based assessments and a shift from high-stake exams to a more continuous and comprehensive evaluation system. The policy also established the National Research Foundation to promote research activities. It encouraged international collaboration and foreign university entry into India. The policy also recognized the importance of digital learning and encouraged the use of regional languages as the medium of instruction.

CONCLUSION:

The study mentioned above seeks to investigate variations in the goals, framework, and content of various national educational policies. Since gaining independence, the Indian government has introduced several policies aimed at making education accessible to all citizens, often at no cost. These policies have played a pivotal role in the evolution of the education system over time. The introduction of diverse structures, courses, and objectives in higher education has contributed to a more comprehensive, adaptable, and multidisciplinary education system.

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Policy on Higher Education: A Comparison of NEP 2020 With NPE 1986 and NPE 1968

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