

National Education Policy 2020: A Transformative Shift in Education to Foster Critical Thinking Among Students

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Abstract

National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the pivotal role of critical thinking in preparing students for the demands of the 21st century and aims to embed it across all aspects of the education system to foster a culture of inquiry, analysis, and innovation. It focuses on the development of the “creative potential” of each student. According to Ken Robinson, “Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.” Developing critical thinking skills takes practice and often involves activities like analyzing texts, engaging in debates, solving problems, and evaluating evidence. It's a skill that is relevant in many aspects of life, from academics and professional settings to everyday decision-making. The policy advocates that the principle aim of education should not only be to develop cognitive skills — both “higher-order cognitive capabilities,” such as critical thinking and problem-solving and “foundational capacities” of numeracy and literacy — but should also be to develop emotional, social, and ethical capacities and dispositions. It encourages creativity, innovation and out-of-the-box thinking at all levels of education with the support of good governance, autonomy, and empowerment. The present paper is an attempt to explore and understand how National Education Policy 2020 can be a transformative act in Education to foster critical thinking among students.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Critical Thinking, Education, 21st Century Skills, Multidisciplinary.

Introduction: National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a comprehensive framework designed to transform the India's educational system. It places a strong emphasis on flexible, multidisciplinary learning, holistic development, and technological integration in the classroom. Released by the Ministry of Education on July 29, 2020, the National Education Policy 2020 aims to promote creativity and critical thinking in 21st-century learners to encourage logical decision-making and innovation. The revised policy strives to recognise, identify and foster each individual's unique capabilities and talents. For the said purpose, it brings noteworthy changes to school curriculum and pedagogy to make both school and higher education more holistic, experiential, integrated, learner-centred, discussion-based, discovery-oriented, inquiry-driven, flexible and enjoyable.

Critical Thinking

According to Elder and Paul that "Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge

of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them." Critical thinking is a valuable skill that involves analyzing information, evaluating arguments, and making reasoned judgments. It's about being able to question assumptions, consider evidence, and understand the complexities of a situation before reaching a conclusion. Critical thinkers are able to recognize biases, identify logical fallacies, and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of different perspectives. One key aspect of critical thinking is being open-minded and willing to consider alternative viewpoints, even if they challenge your own beliefs. It's also about being able to communicate your thoughts clearly and effectively, both orally and in writing. Developing critical thinking skills takes practice and often involves activities like analyzing texts, engaging in debates, solving problems, and evaluating evidence. It's a skill that's valuable in many aspects of life, from academics and professional settings to everyday decision-making.

NEP 2020 and Critical Thinking

The National Education Policy 2020 focuses on the development of the "creative potential" of each student. According to, Ken Robinson, "Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status." Critical thinking is a fundamental component of the NEP 2020, as it underscores the importance of nurturing analytical skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity among students. It suggests using technology to facilitate research, collaboration, and problem-solving, enabling students to develop critical thinking skills in a digital age. It advocates for lessening the curriculum's excessive amount of content so that educators and learners can concentrate on comprehending ideas in-depth rather than skimming through massive volumes of data. The policy advocates that the principle aim of education should not only be to develop cognitive skills — both "higher-order cognitive capabilities," such as critical thinking and problem-solving and "foundational capacities" of numeracy and literacy — but should also be to develop emotional, social, and ethical capacities and dispositions. It encourages creativity, innovation and out-of-the-box thinking at all levels of education with the support of good governance, autonomy, and empowerment.

The following provisions are recommended by the National Education Policy 2020 to cultivate creativity, innovation and critical thinking among the learners:

1. Shift from Rote Learning to Conceptual Understanding:

The National Education Policy lays stress on conceptual clarity rather than rote memorisation and learning for exams. It not only focuses on students' cognitive development but also on developing ethical, character, and Constitutional values to equip them with 21st-century skills like critical thinking, scientific temper, creativity, problem-solving, intellectual curiosity, digital literacy, social responsibility, etc. The key focus of the National Education Policy is to shift the Indian education system towards real understanding and help children grasp "how to learn?" and to do away with the old system of rote learning followed by most schools today.

2. Experiential Learning:

The National Education Policy advocates for hands-on, experiential learning methods over rote memorization. By engaging in activities such as projects, experiments, and field visits, students develop critical thinking skills by applying theoretical knowledge to real-world situations, analyzing outcomes, and making informed decisions. The policy recommends schools adopt experiential learning at every stage of education, along with a few inclusions in the pedagogy. These include: Hands-on learning, storytelling-based pedagogy, arts and games/sport-integrated education. The art-integrated approach will

make the linkages between education and culture stronger. In addition to that Sports-integrated learning is another cross-curricular pedagogical approach. This approach utilizes physical activities including indigenous sports, in pedagogical practices to aid in developing skills such as collaboration, self-initiative, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, citizenship, etc. It will cultivate the holistic development of students by promoting their physical and psychological well-being and enhancing their cognitive abilities.

3. Assessment Reforms:

NEP 2020 calls for a shift from summative assessment to continuous and comprehensive evaluation, emphasizing on assessing students' conceptual understanding and critical thinking abilities rather than mere rote learning capacity. This shift motivates students to think critically, solve problems creatively, and display their understanding through various assessment methods like projects, presentations, and portfolios. The policy recommends that educational institutions should follow Competency-based Assessments as it will promote higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, conceptual clarity, and analysis. 360-degree, Multidimensional Report Card is another radical reform in assessment practice. It is holistic that reflects the progress as well as the uniqueness of each learner in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. It also includes self-assessment and peer assessment, and reflects progress of the child in project-based and inquiry-based learning, quizzes, role plays, group work, portfolios, etc., along with teacher assessment. The holistic progress card is going to act as an important link between home and school and will be accompanied by parent-teacher meetings in order to actively involve parents in their children's holistic education and development.

In order to eliminate the need for undertaking coaching classes and to reverse harmful effects of the current assessment system, the policy proposes to redesign the Board exams to encourage holistic development. Board exams should be made 'easier', providing greater flexibility, student choice, and best-of-two attempts. Moreover, it also highlights that board exams should have two types of questions: Descriptive type and Objective type with multiple-choice questions. Digital Assessments – conduction of online formative and summative assessments can also be considered as the policy tries to instill 21st-century skills among learners by revamping assessments.

4. Teacher Training:

The policy proposes the need for teacher training programs to equip educators with pedagogical techniques that foster critical thinking among students. Teachers are motivated to adopt facilitative teaching methods that encourage inquiry, debate, and analysis, rather than relying solely on lecture-based instruction. Knowing that teachers will require training in high-quality content as well as pedagogy, teacher education will be shifted into multidisciplinary colleges and universities by 2030. NEP 2020 focuses on three pillars: Quality Teacher Education (QTE), Quality in Teaching (Q-in-T) and Quality Assurance (QA) – to ensure continual learning. It has been crafted consistent with the needs of the citizens as a demand for knowledge in society and economy called for a need to acquire new skills on a regular basis. In addition to being knowledgeable about their subject, they must also be equipped with critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is the ability to think deeply about a problem or question, and to come up with creative solutions. It is an important skill for teachers because it allows them to guide their students think critically about the concepts they are learning.

5. Emphasis on Higher Order Thinking Skills:

NEP 2020 endorses the development of higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making, from the foundational stages of education. By

incorporating these skills into the curriculum across all levels, the policy aims to nurture a generation of learners who can think critically and acclimatize to complex challenges in various fields. It also advises for a multidisciplinary approach to learning, where students are encouraged to explore various subjects beyond traditional ones. This approach fosters critical thinking by exposing students to diverse perspectives, enabling them to analyze and synthesize information across different domains. Positive learning outcomes, such as enhanced creativity and innovation, higher-order critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork, communication skills, more in-depth learning and mastery of curricula across fields, increases in social and moral awareness, etc., have been consistently demonstrated by assessments of educational approaches in undergraduate education that integrate the humanities and arts with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Institutions and faculty will be free to innovate in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within a broad framework of higher education qualifications that guarantees consistency across programs, institutions, and traditional "in-class" modes as well as online and ODL learning environments. This will foster creativity. Accordingly, curriculum and pedagogy will be designed by institutions and motivated faculty to ensure a stimulating and engaging learning experience for all students, and continuous formative assessment will be used to further the goals of each programme.

6. Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education:

The aim of a holistic and multidisciplinary education is to develop all capacities of human beings - intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century skills in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field. In order to attain a holistic and multidisciplinary education, the flexible and innovative curricula of all HEIs are instructed to include credit-based courses and projects in the areas of community engagement and service, environmental education, and value-based education. In conclusion, all Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) will offer their students the chance to participate in research internships with faculty and researchers at other HEIs or research institutions, as well as internships with local businesses, industry, artists, craftspeople, etc., as part of a holistic education. This will allow students to actively engage with the practical side of their learning and, as a byproduct, further improve their employability.

7. Reduced Content Load:

NEP 2020 has proposed to reduce Curriculum content in each subject to its core essentials, to create space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning. The recommended content will focus on key concepts, ideas, applications, and problem-solving. It also emphasises that teaching and learning should be conducted in a more interactive manner; questions should be encouraged, and classroom sessions should regularly contain more fun, creative, collaborative, and exploratory activities for students for deeper and more experiential learning.

8. Life Skills Education :

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges the significance of holistic development of students, including the attainment of life skills. Life skills education is considered as integral to train students for the challenges of the 21st century. The pedagogical practices also help in developing skills such as collaboration, self-initiative, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, citizenship, etc. Sports-integrated learning will help students adopt fitness as a lifelong temperament and attain the

related life skills along with the levels of fitness as envisaged in the Fit India Movement. The policy has also recommended to develop an outstanding adult education curriculum framework so as to develop synergy with and build upon NCERT's existing expertise in establishing outstanding curricula for literacy, numeracy, basic education, vocational skills, and beyond. The adult education curriculum framework will comprise a minimum of five program types, including: (a) basic literacy and numeracy; (b) critical life skills, which include health care and awareness, financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, and family welfare; (c) vocational skills development; (d) basic education, which includes preparatory, middle, and secondary stage equivalency; and (e) continuing education, which includes engaging holistic adult education courses in the arts, sciences, technology, culture, sports, and recreation, as well as other topics of interest or use to local learners, like more advanced material on critical life skills). The framework would keep in mind that adults in many cases will require rather different teaching-learning methods and materials than those designed for children.

9. Embracing Technology for Uninterrupted Learning:

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the need for online learning. Therefore, the new National Education Policy recommends that all educational institutions leverage EdTech solutions to ensure uninterrupted learning and teaching. For this, the policy recommends certain key initiatives, such as: Public Digital Infrastructure, Learning Management System/ERP Software, Virtual Labs, Digital Repositories, Wide-scale Dissemination of Learning Materials, Teachers' Involvement in Content Creation, Fun-based Learning through Student-appropriate Apps and Games, Upgrading Existing eLearning Platforms. By promoting the use of modern tools and technologies in education, the Policy aims to make learning accessible to each individual at all levels of education.

Conclusion

After an extensive study of the above discussed provisions, it can be concluded that NEP 2020 seeks to integrate critical thinking into every facet of the educational system in order to promote a culture of inquiry, analysis, and creativity. It acknowledges the vital role that critical thinking plays in educating students for the demands of the twenty-first century. The NEP 2020 emphasizes the value of critical thinking as a higher order thinking talent and the necessity of helping students to acquire it. Critical thinking skills is indeed very urgent to be instilled among students as it provides them with the skills to evaluate, generalise, reason out, question, etc, on various themes of concern, particularly those concerning their lived experiences. It is intended that educators and principals would become persuaded that critical thinking is an essential component of education and will, as a result, establish classroom environments and opportunities that foster the development of this crucial skill.

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