

National Education Policy - 2020 and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision of Education: A Comprehensive Analytical Study

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Abstract

Education has historically functioned as a transformative force in societies marked by inequality and structural injustice. In India, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar conceptualized education as the most potent instrument for social emancipation, democratic participation, and human dignity. His educational philosophy emphasized inclusivity, scientific temperament, women's empowerment, higher education for marginalized communities, and constitutional safeguards for weaker sections. The National Education Policy–2020 (NEP-2020) represents a landmark reform initiative aimed at restructuring India's education system to make it inclusive, multidisciplinary, flexible, and aligned with global standards.

This research paper critically examines the philosophical foundations of Dr. Ambedkar's educational vision and analyzes its relevance within the framework of NEP-2020. Using qualitative and descriptive methodology based on secondary sources, the study undertakes a comparative analysis of Ambedkar's educational ideas and the structural reforms proposed in NEP-2020. The findings reveal significant ideological convergence, particularly in areas of universal access, equity, gender inclusion, research orientation, and constitutional values. The paper concludes that while NEP-2020 reflects many of Ambedkar's transformative ideals, its success depends upon effective implementation, financial commitment, and sustained socio-political will.

Keywords: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, National Education Policy–2020, Inclusive Education, Social Justice, Higher Education Reform, Equality.

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as the cornerstone of democratic development and social mobility. In societies characterized by deep-rooted hierarchies, education serves not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge but as an instrument of liberation. India's socio-historical context—marked by caste discrimination, untouchability, gender bias, and economic inequality—makes education a critical vehicle for transformation.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), jurist, economist, social reformer, and principal architect of the Indian Constitution, viewed education as a revolutionary force capable of dismantling oppressive structures. Born into a marginalized Mahar family, Ambedkar experienced systemic discrimination firsthand. Through education, he transcended social barriers and later dedicated his life to ensuring educational access for the oppressed.

The National Education Policy–2020 (NEP-2020), introduced by the Government of India, seeks to transform India’s education system by emphasizing access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. It envisions a holistic and multidisciplinary education model aligned with constitutional values.

This study explores whether NEP-2020 embodies the educational ideals envisioned by Dr. Ambedkar and evaluates its transformative potential in contemporary India.

2. Review of Literature

Scholars have extensively examined Ambedkar’s philosophy of education. Sharma et al. (2022) emphasize that Ambedkar regarded education as essential for empowerment and equality. Jogan (2017) describes Ambedkar’s vision as “education for liberation,” highlighting its emancipatory dimension. Narake (2005) notes that Ambedkar prioritized higher education for marginalized communities to cultivate intellectual leadership.

Recent academic discussions also explore the relationship between Ambedkar’s ideas and NEP-2020. Dange (2020) argues that NEP-2020 reflects Ambedkar’s inclusive educational framework. However, critics caution that implementation gaps may undermine policy objectives.

Despite these discussions, there remains a need for a comprehensive comparative analysis integrating philosophical, constitutional, and policy perspectives—an endeavor this paper seeks to undertake.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s philosophy of education.
2. To analyse the structural and conceptual features of NEP-2020.
3. To identify philosophical convergence between Ambedkar’s ideas and NEP-2020.
4. To assess the relevance of Ambedkar’s educational thought in contemporary India.
5. To propose policy recommendations for strengthening inclusive education.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design.

1. **Type of Research:** Analytical and comparative.
2. **Data Sources:** Secondary sources including books, scholarly articles, government documents, speeches of Dr. Ambedkar, and official NEP-2020 documentation.
3. **Method of Analysis:** Content analysis and thematic comparison.

The study is conceptual in nature and does not involve primary survey data.

5. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s Educational Philosophy

5.1 Education as Social Emancipation

Ambedkar believed that education empowers individuals to challenge injustice. His famous call—“Educate, Organize, Agitate”—highlights education as the foundation of social struggle.

He considered education essential for democracy, asserting that uneducated citizens cannot meaningfully participate in democratic governance.

5.2 Universal and Free Primary Education

Ambedkar advocated free and compulsory primary education. He warned against high dropout rates and stressed that literacy must be lifelong.

His influence is reflected in constitutional provisions such as Article 45 and later Article 21-A (Right to Education).

5.3 Higher Education and Intellectual Empowerment

Ambedkar strongly supported higher education for marginalized communities. He founded the People's Education Society to expand access.

He believed universities should integrate teaching and research, fostering critical inquiry and rational thought.

5.4 Women's Education and Gender Equality

Ambedkar viewed women's progress as essential to national progress. He supported co-education and legal reforms promoting gender justice.

5.5 Scientific Temper and Secular Education

He rejected traditional caste-based educational monopoly and promoted scientific, rational, and secular education to dismantle social hierarchies.

6. Key Features of National Education Policy–2020

NEP-2020 introduces transformative reforms:

6.1 Structural Reform: 5+3+3+4 Model

Replaces the 10+2 system with a developmentally aligned structure.

6.2 Universal Access

Targets 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in school education.

6.3 Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

National Mission for foundational learning by Grade 3.

6.4 Multidisciplinary Higher Education

Encourages holistic learning and flexible degree structures.

6.5 Academic Bank of Credits

Facilitates mobility and lifelong learning.

6.6 Gender Inclusion Fund

Supports female participation in education.

6.7 Focus on SEDGs

Prioritizes socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

6.8 National Research Foundation

Promotes research culture.

6.9 Skill and Vocational Education

Integrates vocational training from school level.

6.10 Promotion of Constitutional Values

Emphasizes ethics, critical thinking, and citizenship.

7. Comparative Analysis

A comparative study reveals significant alignment:

Dimension	Ambedkar	NEP-2020
Access	Free & universal education	Universal enrolment
Equality	Uplift of depressed classes	SEDGs focus

Dimension	Ambedkar	NEP-2020
Women Empowerment	Equal rights	Gender Inclusion Fund
Higher Education	Research & intellectualism	Multidisciplinary & NRF
Democracy	Education for citizenship	Constitutional values

The parallels suggest philosophical continuity.

8. Challenges in the Implementation of NEP-2020 in the Light of Ambedkar's Vision

Although National Education Policy 2020 reflects many aspects of B. R. Ambedkar's educational philosophy, its practical implementation faces multiple structural, financial, and socio-cultural challenges. If these issues are not addressed systematically, the transformative potential of the policy may remain limited.

8.1 Financial Constraints

NEP-2020 recommends public investment in education up to 6% of GDP. However, actual allocation often falls short of this target. Insufficient funding directly affects:

- Infrastructure development in rural and tribal areas
- Teacher recruitment and professional training
- Research funding and innovation
- Digital infrastructure in government schools

Ambedkar considered education a foundational right essential for dignity and equality. Without adequate financial commitment, the principle of equitable access remains theoretical rather than practical.

8.2 Digital Divide

The expansion of digital learning, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has revealed stark inequalities in access to technology.

- Limited internet connectivity in rural regions
- Lack of digital devices among economically disadvantaged students
- Low digital literacy levels among parents and teachers

Since NEP-2020 emphasizes digital education and online resources, the digital divide may widen educational inequality unless corrective measures are implemented. Ambedkar's vision of universal access demands technological inclusion for marginalized communities.

8.3 Persistent Social Inequality and Caste-Based Discrimination

Ambedkar viewed education as a weapon against caste oppression. However, social discrimination continues to influence educational outcomes.

- Higher dropout rates among SC/ST students
- Underrepresentation in elite higher education institutions
- Subtle discrimination within academic spaces

Although NEP-2020 focuses on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), structural bias and societal attitudes may hinder effective implementation.

8.4 Quality and Training of Teachers

Ambedkar regarded teachers as "nation-builders." NEP-2020 proposes reforms in teacher education, including integrated B.Ed. programs and professional development. However:

- Many teacher training institutions lack quality standards
- Rural schools suffer from teacher shortages

- Continuous professional development is uneven

Without well-trained and socially sensitive educators, inclusive educational reform cannot succeed.

8.5 Administrative and Institutional Barriers

Policy implementation requires coordination between central and state governments.

- Bureaucratic delays
- Unequal state-level capacity
- Inconsistent monitoring mechanisms
- Resistance to systemic reforms

Ambedkar emphasized not just legislation but effective execution. Institutional inertia may limit NEP-2020's transformative capacity.

9. Findings of the Study

The comparative analysis between Ambedkar's educational philosophy and NEP-2020 reveals several key findings:

9.1 Strong Philosophical Convergence

There is significant alignment between Ambedkar's ideals and NEP-2020's framework, particularly regarding:

- Social justice and equality
- Democratic citizenship
- Scientific and rational outlook
- Universal access to education

Both advocate education as a transformative force for society.

9.2 Emphasis on Inclusion

NEP-2020's focus on SEDGs mirrors Ambedkar's lifelong struggle for the upliftment of marginalized communities. Provisions such as scholarships, gender inclusion funds, and equitable access mechanisms resonate strongly with his philosophy.

9.3 Higher Education and Research Orientation

Ambedkar strongly promoted higher education and intellectual empowerment. NEP-2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary universities, flexible curricula, and the National Research Foundation aligns with this vision.

9.4 Implementation-Dependent Success

While ideologically robust, the success of NEP-2020 depends on:

- Financial investment
- Institutional capacity
- Political will
- Social awareness

Without these, philosophical alignment may not translate into measurable outcomes.

10. Suggestions

10.1 Increase Public Investment in Education

- Ensure sustained funding at or above 6% of GDP
- Allocate targeted funds for SC/ST and tribal regions
- Expand scholarship and fellowship programs

- Strengthen research grants and innovation funds

Financial equity is fundamental to Ambedkar's inclusive vision.

10.2 Promote Digital Inclusion

- Provide subsidized or free digital devices to marginalized students
- Expand rural broadband infrastructure
- Introduce digital literacy programs for teachers and communities
- Develop multilingual digital educational resources

Bridging the digital divide is essential for equal opportunity.

10.3 Strengthen Teacher Education and Professional Development

- Standardize quality benchmarks for teacher training institutions
- Implement mandatory social justice and constitutional value training
- Encourage research-oriented teaching methods
- Provide incentives for teachers serving in remote areas

Teachers must embody the constitutional and democratic ideals emphasized by Ambedkar.

10.4 Promote Social Awareness and Constitutional Education

- Integrate constitutional values into curricula
- Conduct anti-discrimination and equality awareness campaigns
- Encourage community participation in educational governance
- Develop inclusive campus policies

Education must foster fraternity and dignity.

10.5 Establish Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

- Create independent evaluation bodies
- Publish annual implementation progress reports
- Ensure transparency in funding utilization
- Use data-driven policy review systems

Accountability strengthens democratic governance and policy success.

11. Conclusion

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar envisioned education as the foundation of a just, democratic, and egalitarian society. For him, education was not merely a means of individual advancement but a transformative instrument to dismantle caste hierarchy and promote human dignity.

The National Education Policy–2020 represents a comprehensive reform aimed at restructuring India's education system to meet contemporary global and national challenges. Its emphasis on inclusion, flexibility, research, skill development, and constitutional values reflects Ambedkar's foundational principles.

However, the true realization of Ambedkar's educational vision depends on:

- Effective implementation
- Adequate financial investment
- Addressing social discrimination
- Ensuring technological inclusion
- Sustained political and societal commitment

In conclusion, NEP-2020 can be viewed as a significant step toward actualizing Ambedkar's dream of educational democracy. Yet, policy transformation must go beyond documentation and become a lived

reality for India's most marginalized citizens. Only then can education truly function as the instrument of liberation that Ambedkar envisioned.

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