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## National Education Policy 2020: Transforming Education in Bihar

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### Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Government of India, is a transformative framework aimed at revamping the Indian education system to meet global standards while preserving local values. With its emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary and skill-based education, the NEP is expected to have a profound impact on states like Bihar, which grapple with educational challenges such as high dropout rates, inadequate infrastructure and low literacy levels. Bihar has long struggled with low literacy rates. Before the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the state recorded a literacy rate of just 61.80%, significantly lower than the national average. The NEP 2020 aims to change that by reshaping India's education system, with a focus on providing quality education for all. This article explores the alignment of Bihar's education system with the NEP 2020, focusing on its potential to address regional issues, foster equity, and promote inclusive development. The policy's emphasis on early childhood care, regional languages, vocational training, and digital education presents unique opportunities for Bihar to bridge gaps and build a resilient educational framework.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Holistic Education, Regional Languages, Digital Education

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### Introduction:

NEP 2020, introduced by the Government of India, marks a significant milestone in the history of Indian education. Designed to replace the National Policy on Education, 1986, this policy aims to revamp the education system to make it more inclusive, equitable, and relevant to the changing needs of society and the global economy. It envisions an education framework that nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and a lifelong love for learning while preserving India's rich cultural heritage.

With an ambitious vision, the NEP 2020 seeks to achieve holistic development, integrate technology, and enhance accessibility for all, creating a globally competitive and self-reliant education system.

#### *Key Features of NEP 2020<sup>1</sup>*

1. **Structural Reform: The 5+3+3+4 Framework**  
The NEP introduces a shift from the traditional 10+2 schooling structure to a more age-appropriate 5+3+3+4 format.  
Foundational Stage (5 years): Covers ages 3–8, focusing on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).  
Preparatory Stage (3 years): For ages 8–11, emphasizing activity-based learning.  
Middle Stage (3 years): For ages 11–14, introducing multidisciplinary education with experiential learning.  
Secondary Stage (4 years): For ages 14–18, emphasizing flexibility and choice of subjects.

2. **Focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE):**  
The policy recognizes the importance of foundational learning. Anganwadis and pre-schools will be strengthened to provide high-quality ECCE to children aged 3–6, laying a strong foundation for literacy and numeracy.
3. **Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education:**  
NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary learning across disciplines, allowing students to pursue varied combinations of subjects, such as science, arts, and vocational skills. It emphasizes holistic education by integrating curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities.
4. **Emphasis on Regional Languages:**  
The policy mandates the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction up to at least Grade 5, with the aim of preserving linguistic diversity and improving comprehension among students.
5. **Skill Development and Vocational Education:**  
Vocational training is integrated into the curriculum from Grade 6 onwards, aiming to equip students with practical skills and industry-specific knowledge.
6. **Digital and Online Learning:**  
NEP 2020 emphasizes leveraging technology to bridge educational gaps. Initiatives include digital content creation, online platforms, and teacher training programs to facilitate e-learning.

7. **Reforming Assessment Systems:**  
The policy advocates for a shift from rote memorization to conceptual understanding and skill development. A 360-degree holistic progress card will replace traditional report cards, assessing cognitive, emotional, and social development.
8. **Promoting Equity and Inclusion:**  
NEP 2020 seeks to address disparities in education by ensuring equal opportunities for all, with special focus on marginalized communities, differently-able students, and girls.
9. **Higher Education Reforms:**  
The policy proposes a multidisciplinary higher education framework, flexible curricula, multiple entry-exit options, and the establishment of a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to oversee institutions.
10. **Bridging the Skill Gap**  
With its focus on vocational training and skill development, the NEP prepares students for the evolving demands of the job market. By introducing practical skills alongside academics, it seeks to reduce unemployment and enhance employability among the youth.
11. **Fostering Innovation and Creativity**  
The multidisciplinary approach and flexibility in subject choices allow students to pursue their passions, fostering innovation and creativity. This holistic learning environment is expected to produce well-rounded individuals equipped for the challenges of the modern world.
12. **Strengthening Higher Education**  
The proposed reforms in higher education aim to create a robust system that is globally competitive while addressing domestic challenges. The multiple entry and exit options in degree programs make education flexible, allowing students to customize their academic journey.
13. **Boosting Research and Development**  
The establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) is a major highlight, aimed at promoting research across disciplines. By fostering a culture of inquiry and innovation, the NEP seeks to position India as a global leader in knowledge creation.
14. **Leveraging Technology in Education**  
The emphasis on digital education aligns with the increasing importance of technology in learning. By adopting online platforms and digital tools, the policy addresses challenges such as teacher shortages, accessibility, and the need for personalized learning.

#### *Challenges in Implementation<sup>2</sup>*

**Despite its visionary goals, the NEP 2020 faces several challenges in execution:**

1. **Financial Constraints:**  
The policy recommends allocating 6% of GDP to education, a target that remains difficult to achieve given current budgetary allocations.
2. **Infrastructure and Resources:**  
India's education system, particularly in rural areas, lacks adequate infrastructure and trained personnel to implement the changes envisioned by NEP.
3. **Resistance to Change:**  
Reforming traditional pedagogical practices and systems requires overcoming resistance from educators, administrators, and other stakeholders.
4. **Digital Divide:**  
While NEP emphasizes digital education, the lack of internet connectivity and devices in remote areas poses a significant hurdle.
5. **Linguistic Challenges:**  
Implementing regional languages as the medium of instruction requires creating appropriate content and training teachers proficient in these languages.

#### **Current Educational Landscape in Bihar**

Despite the progress, Bihar's education sector continues to grapple with several challenges<sup>3</sup>:

1. **Inadequate Infrastructure**  
Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, functional toilets, electricity, and drinking water. The student-teacher ratio remains skewed, with a shortage of trained and qualified educators.
2. **High Dropout Rates**  
The dropout rate is alarmingly high, particularly among girls and marginalized communities. Economic hardships, child labor, and early marriages are major factors contributing to this issue.
3. **Quality of Education**  
Learning outcomes in Bihar lag behind national standards. A large percentage of students in primary and secondary schools struggle with foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Teacher absenteeism and inadequate training affect the quality of classroom teaching.
4. **Digital Divide**  
The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the stark digital divide in Bihar. With limited access to Smartphones, Computers, and reliable internet, a significant portion of students was excluded from online education. This divide is particularly pronounced in rural and economically weaker sections of the state.
5. **Gender Disparities**  
Although programs promoting girls' education have shown positive results, societal barriers and cultural norms continue to limit educational

opportunities for girls, particularly in rural areas.

#### 6. Limited Focus on Vocational Education

There is a lack of integration between vocational training and the mainstream education system. This gap leaves many students unprepared for employment in the evolving job market.

#### Government Initiatives and Policies

##### 1. Strengthening School Education

The Bihar government has implemented several schemes to improve school education, including:

*Mid-Day Meal Scheme*<sup>4</sup>: To address malnutrition and encourage school attendance.

*Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana*: To provide bicycles to girls in secondary schools, reducing dropout rates and improving mobility.

*Unnayan Bihar*: A digital initiative to enhance learning through online resources and smart classrooms.

##### 2. Higher Education Reforms

Efforts to improve higher education in Bihar include:

Establishing new universities and upgrading existing institutions.

Launching technical education programs in partnership with national institutions like IIT and NIT.

##### 3. Focus on Skill Development<sup>5</sup>

Under the Skill Development Mission, Bihar is promoting vocational training and skill-building programs to enhance employability among youth. These initiatives aim to create a workforce ready to meet the demands of various industries.

##### 4. Digital Education

Post-COVID-19, the state has increased its focus on digital education through initiatives like e-learning platforms, teacher training in digital tools, and expanding internet connectivity in rural areas.

##### 5. The Role of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020<sup>6</sup>

**The National Education Policy 2020 offers a comprehensive framework to address many of the challenges faced by Bihar's education system.**

#### Key aspects include:

- ❖ Focus on Early Childhood Education: Strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy through upgraded Anganwadis and pre-primary schools.
- ❖ Emphasis on Regional Languages: Using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction can improve comprehension and retention among students.
- ❖ Integration of Vocational Training: Introducing vocational courses from Grade 6 can enhance employability and bridge the skill gap.

- ❖ Promotion of Digital Learning: Leveraging technology to provide equitable access to quality education in rural and underserved areas.

#### Opportunities for Improvement

1. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Encouraging collaborations between the government and private sector can help address infrastructure gaps and introduce innovative teaching methods.
2. Teacher Training and Recruitment: Investing in professional development programs and recruiting qualified educators are crucial for improving learning outcomes.
3. Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms: Regular monitoring and evaluation of schools can ensure accountability and identify areas for intervention.
4. Focus on Marginalized Communities: Special schemes targeting economically weaker sections, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and minorities can promote greater inclusion and equity.
5. Leveraging Technology: Expanding digital infrastructure and providing affordable devices can bridge the digital divide and improve access to online education.

#### Key Challenges in Bihar's Education System

Before examining the impact of NEP 2020, it is important to understand the existing challenges in Bihar's education sector<sup>7</sup>:

##### 1. High Dropout Rates:

Economic hardship, early marriages, and child labor contribute to high dropout rates, particularly among girls and marginalized communities.

##### 2. Inadequate Infrastructure

Many schools in rural areas lack basic facilities such as functional classrooms, toilets, and drinking water.

##### 3. Quality of Education

Low learning outcomes are prevalent, with many students struggling with foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

##### 4. Teacher Shortage

The state faces a shortage of trained teachers, and existing teachers often lack access to modern pedagogical training.

##### 5. Digital Divide

Limited access to technology and internet connectivity in rural areas hinders the potential of online education.

#### Opportunities Offered by NEP 2020 for Bihar

NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive framework to address these challenges, offering several opportunities to improve Bihar's education system:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): NEP 2020 emphasizes foundational literacy and numeracy through Early Childhood Care and

Education (ECCE). In Bihar, where a significant portion of children struggle with basic reading and math skills, the policy's focus on upgrading Anganwadi centers and introducing pre-primary education can significantly improve learning outcomes.

2. **Regional Languages as Medium of Instruction:**  
The use of the mother tongue or regional languages as the medium of instruction up to Grade 5 aligns well with Bihar's linguistic diversity. Teaching in languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili, or Magahi can enhance comprehension, boost enrollment, and preserve cultural heritage.
3. **Vocational Education and Skill Development:**  
Bihar's youth can benefit immensely from the integration of vocational training into the school curriculum starting from Grade 6. By promoting local crafts, agriculture, and other industries, the policy can reduce unemployment and empower the state's workforce.
4. **Digital and Online Education:**  
The emphasis on digital learning under NEP 2020 provides an opportunity to bridge the educational divide in Bihar. Initiatives like the PM eVIDYA program and the use of digital content can make quality education accessible even in remote areas, provided that infrastructure and connectivity are improved.
5. **Flexibility in Higher Education:**  
NEP 2020 introduces a flexible higher education system with multiple entry and exit options, which can benefit students in Bihar who face economic constraints or other challenges that disrupt their studies.
6. **Equity and Inclusion:**  
The policy's emphasis on equity addresses the needs of marginalized communities in Bihar, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and economically weaker sections. Provisions for scholarships, financial aid, and gender-sensitive initiatives can help reduce educational disparities.
7. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:**  
The NEP's focus on continuous professional development and teacher training can address the issue of untrained educators in Bihar. Modern pedagogical approaches and capacity-building programs can enhance the quality of teaching across the state.

#### **Potential Impact of NEP 2020 on Bihar<sup>8</sup>**

1. **Improvement in Primary and Secondary Education:**  
The NEP's restructuring of the school system into the 5+3+3+4 format can bring much-needed reform to Bihar's education system. By focusing on foundational stages, activity-based learning, and holistic development, the policy

can improve enrollment and retention rates, particularly in rural areas.

2. **Boost to Girls' Education:**  
Programs like the Cycle Yojana and other state schemes have already shown promise in promoting girls' education in Bihar. NEP 2020's emphasis on gender equity and inclusion will further encourage female participation in education, helping to close the gender gap.
3. **Enhanced Skill Development:**  
The integration of vocational education will help Bihar's youth acquire industry-relevant skills. Given the state's dependence on agriculture and small-scale industries, this focus on vocational training can create job opportunities and reduce migration for employment.
4. **Bridging the Digital Divide:**  
While Bihar faces significant challenges in digital connectivity, the NEP's push for online education provides an opportunity for the state to invest in digital infrastructure. Government initiatives like Digital India can play a crucial role in enabling access to e-learning platforms.
5. **Promotion of Higher Education:**  
The establishment of multidisciplinary institutions and the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) under NEP 2020 can elevate the quality of higher education in Bihar. The focus on research and innovation can encourage talented students to pursue advanced studies within the state.
6. **Preservation of Linguistic and Cultural Identity:**  
By promoting regional languages as mediums of instruction, NEP 2020 can help preserve Bihar's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. This approach also improves learning outcomes for students who are more comfortable learning in their native languages.
7. **Addressing Regional Disparities:**  
The policy's focus on equity can reduce the educational divide between urban and rural areas in Bihar. Targeted schemes for marginalized communities and backward regions can create a more balanced and inclusive education system.

#### **Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 in Bihar**

While NEP 2020 offers numerous opportunities, its implementation in Bihar faces several challenges:

- ❖ **Funding Constraints:** Allocating 6% of GDP to education, as recommended by the policy, remains a significant hurdle for the state.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Gaps:** Poor school infrastructure in rural areas may delay the execution of key reforms, such as vocational training and digital learning.
- ❖ **Shortage of Trained Teachers:** Addressing the shortage of qualified educators and ensuring

their professional development is crucial for the policy's success.

- ❖ Resistance to Change: Implementing new pedagogical practices and curricula may face resistance from traditional stakeholders.
- ❖ Digital Divide: Bridging the digital gap in rural areas will require substantial investment in technology and connectivity.

#### Way Forward

To fully leverage the benefits of NEP 2020, Bihar must adopt a multi-pronged strategy<sup>9</sup>:

- ❖ Infrastructure Development: Upgrading school facilities and improving access to basic amenities should be prioritized.
- ❖ Teacher Training Programs: Investing in the professional development of teachers will enhance the quality of education.
- ❖ Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Collaborations with private organizations can help bridge resource gaps, particularly in vocational education and digital infrastructure.
- ❖ Targeted Interventions: Special focus on marginalized communities and gender-sensitive policies can promote inclusivity.
- ❖ Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing robust mechanisms to track the implementation of NEP reforms can ensure accountability and address challenges in real-time.

#### Conclusion:

The National Education Policy 2020 has the potential to revolutionize Bihar's education system, addressing its longstanding challenges and creating opportunities for growth and development. By focusing on foundational literacy, vocational training, equity, and digital education, the policy aligns with the state's need for an inclusive, skill-oriented, and resilient education framework.

While challenges in implementation remain, a collaborative approach involving the government, private sector, and civil society can pave the way for transformative change. With effective execution, NEP 2020 can play a pivotal role in empowering Bihar's youth, preserving its cultural heritage, and driving the state's socio-economic progress.

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