

# A SOCIOLOGICAL INSPECTION OF THE NEW EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE IN INDIA: THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION - IS THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL REALLY SIGNIFICANT?

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Indian National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has set a lofty objective for the holistic development of children and has recognized the crucial significance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The ECCE program of the NEP 2020 aims to bring about a substantial change in the Indian education system by prioritizing the crucial early years of a child's development. It recognizes that offering children exceptional early education and creating positive learning environments during this time can significantly and permanently impact a child's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical growth. The ECCE component of the NEP 2020 places a high importance on promoting inclusion and equity. It achieves this by ensuring that all children, irrespective of their socio-economic background, talents, or cultural diversity, have equal chances and participation in educational activities. This study aims to investigate the correlation among the NEP 2020, ECCE, and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, "*refers to the intangible social advantages that are independent of financial resources.*" Instead, these benefits enable individuals to rise in social status and improve their capacity to access cultural and educational opportunities. So far, no study has conducted a rigorous exploration of the potential major link between the NEP 2020, ECCE, and cultural capital. Understanding the elements that impact early childhood education is of utmost importance as India implements significant educational reforms.

**KEYWORDS:** National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Early Childhood Care and Education, Cultural Capital, Habitus, Social Inequality

## **INTRODUCTION**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is developed in compliance with the constitutional mandates that regulate education in India. These segments embody the ideals of impartiality, parity, and liberty as delineated in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India. The preamble of our Constitution highlights the principle of inclusivity and equal standing for every individual. The principle of equality dictates that it is unacceptable to engage in discrimination against persons based on their social rank, caste, socioeconomic class, or religious beliefs, as mandated by the law. In a similar vein, the NEP 2020 has adopted this concept and has redefined equality as equity, acknowledging the importance of ensuring equitable opportunities for every citizen of India (Singh and Mishra, 2023). The concept of equal opportunity is only meaningful if there is fair and impartial access to education. The NEP 2020 places a high importance on ensuring fair and comprehensive education, addressing inequalities, advancing female education, incorporating children with disabilities, and adhering to the Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009. The Indian government has demonstrated a significant and determined measure by implementing the NEP 2020. The Indian government has officially approved the NEP 2020, marking a substantial change in policy after a 35-year's gap since the last modification in 1986. The National Education Policy, 2020, is considered a crucial

framework for making decisions about education. India, known for its steadfast dedication to emphasizing education, aims to tackle gender, socioeconomic, and regional inequalities by actively engaging the community. This technique aims to foster equity and guarantee impartiality in educational policies. Pierre Bourdieu, an eminent sociologist, is highly acknowledged in the field of “*sociology of education*” for his significant theory on “*cultural capital*.” According to his theoretical framework, children belonging to more affluent social groups possess an edge inside the education system due to their families’ acquisition of cultural knowledge and linguistic proficiency. This review composition seeks to comprehensively inspect the present scenario of education in India, with a specific emphasis on the “*National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*,” “*Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*,” and the concept of “*Cultural Capital*.”

### **The New Educational Landscape - National Education Policy (Nep) 2020 Of India**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was approved by the Government of India on July 29th, 2020. This approach will include substantial and innovative alterations in both the primary and higher education sectors. The NEP 2020 serves as the principal authoritative directive for education in India in the twenty-first century. It advocates for a thorough and systematic reform of the nation’s existing educational system. The NEP 2020 prioritizes sustainable human development and aims to ensure fair and equal access to education at all levels, ranging from pre-school to secondary education. The NEP 2020 has established an ambitious goal for the comprehensive development of students and has acknowledged the vital importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) initiative, a component of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, seeks to significantly impact the Indian school system by giving priority to the critical early stages of a child’s growth and development. The NEP 2020 places Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a primary emphasis in fostering the comprehensive growth of children between the ages of 3 and 8. This statement acknowledges that providing children with great early education and establishing conducive learning settings can significantly and enduringly influence a child’s emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Investing in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India is a vital and genuine initiative.

### **National Education Policy (Nep) 2020 And National Policy On Education (Npe) 1986 – Key Differences**

The NEP 2020 is a comprehensive and inclusive vision that is crucial in shaping India’s future progress as a Nation. The implementation of the NEP 2020 occurred after a period of over thirty years. The NEP 2020 prioritizes a versatile and practical method of instruction throughout the early years, with the goal of fostering comprehensive growth and preparedness for formal education. The objective is to guarantee that each child has equitable access to exceptional Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), which cultivates a profound inclination to acquire knowledge from an early age and establishes a solid basis in the initial phases of human growth.

ECCE has a significant and long-lasting influence on the development and advancement of children and is seen as crucial in inspiring young folks to enroll in and actively participate in formal education. Studies indicate that carefully planned early childhood education programs have demonstrated the capacity to decrease the likelihood of students dropping out of school early or repeating grades, while also enhancing academic achievement across all levels of schooling.

The primary objective of the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) is to ensure equal and unhindered access to education for all children up to the age of 14, with a particular focus on their enrollment and continued attendance in schools. This approach places a high importance on guaranteeing equal opportunities for education for every person, thereby promoting fairness and inclusiveness. The primary aim of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986 was to improve and provide equal opportunities for education for all citizens of India, raise literacy rates, and tackle inefficiencies and stagnation in the education system. Conversely, the NEP 2020 is based on the fundamental concepts of being easily accessible, of high quality, fair, affordable, and responsible. The NEP 2020 places emphasis on creating well-organized, flexible, multidisciplinary Indian institutions.

### **Early Childhood Care And Education (Ecce) – The Strategy For The Holistic Development**

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), often known as pre-primary or pre-school education, typically involve educational instruction given to children aged three to six years. ECCE refers to a wide range of programs that aim to promote the physical, cognitive, and social development of children before they start primary school. ECCE plays a crucial role in shaping the long-term growth and education of children. It achieves this by creating a nurturing and intellectually engaging environment throughout the crucial early stages of their lifetime learning journey. Connecting the learning process to individuals' personal experiences is more beneficial than adhering to a rigid formal format. Participating in recreational activities such as playing, singing, and painting, using resources from the local area, is essential for developing communication skills, self-expression, and informal social interaction in ECCE (Shastri and Rajput, 2022). The NEP 2020 aims to broaden the scope of ECCE facilities, particularly by incorporating economically disadvantaged segments of the Indian Society.

Research suggests that India has a long-standing tradition of recognizing the early stages of a child's life, as well as a diverse cultural heritage of ceremonies aimed at promoting growth and instilling important principles and social abilities in young people, known as "sanskaras." In the past, the responsibility of taking care of children was mainly entrusted to extended families, who relied on conventional practices that were consistently transmitted from one generation to the next. Significant transformations have occurred in both familial and societal contexts in the past few decades. The country has significant diversity in its geography, society, culture, language, and economy, which is apparent in its families and communities. Children also vary in their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive capacities. Elements such as socio-economic position, social dynamics, and cultural variety have influences on the family life and nurture of children in India. Children with exceptional needs and their families necessitate support and knowledge concerning diagnosis and early intervention to facilitate the advancement of children's development. To attain widespread availability of cost-free and all-encompassing early childhood education, proactive measures need to be implemented to overcome obstacles and guarantee that complete programs are readily available to every individual. Every child, regardless of their financial means, social status, geographic location, or any other obstacles, is entitled to an equitable and unbiased opportunity to develop and enhance their own abilities. India prioritizes enhancing the capacity of families, communities, and organizations to provide exceptional care and education for young children. Parents are crucial in creating a dynamic educational environment for their child. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize and commit resources to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as it is the most efficient and economical method to break the cycle of repeated

disadvantages across generations and address inequality. Without a doubt, allocating resources to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) will result in significant and long-lasting social and economic advantages.

## Social Inequality And The Concept Of Cultural Capital

The model of “*cultural capital*” and “*habitus*” explore the mechanisms that contribute to the unequal opportunities and outcomes in the society. Pierre Bourdieu argues that *children from higher socioeconomic origins have an advantage in the education system because their families have acquired cultural enlightenment and linguistic proficiency*. Lamont and Lareau (1988) define cultural capital as “*institutionalized signals that are widely accepted and culturally significant, such as attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials, which are used to socially and culturally exclude others.*” Bourdieu’s broader model of “*social action*” includes the concept of “*habitus.*” Habitus is the comprehensive perspective of an individual towards the world, primarily shaped by their social standing. Habitus, as defined by Swartz (1997), refers to a set of ingrained inclinations that have a significant impact on one’s actions. Specifically, those in positions of privilege prefer to behave in a manner that preserves their advantages for their children, while economically disadvantaged individuals have limited access to future chances. It includes many predispositions that are impacted by social class and serves to maintain inequality in the society.

Bourdieu recognizes capital and habitus contribute to inequality in the realm of education. “*In the field of education, cultural capital is considered the most valuable type of capital, surpassing economic, social, and symbolic capital*” (Bourdieu, 1997). Cultural Capital can be classified into three primary forms: objectification, institutionalization and embodiment. Cultural capital encompasses a broad understanding of culture, expertise in verbal communication, and a profound appreciation for universally acclaimed “great art” (Swartz, 1997). From an “*objectification*” standpoint, cultural capital refers to tangible items such as artwork or musical instruments that necessitate a deep understanding and enjoyment of cultural knowledge. “*Institutionalized*” cultural capital refers to the academic qualifications obtained from prominent educational institutions. The notion of “*embodied*” cultural capital is especially relevant to the dynamics that occur within the educational system. Bourdieu argues “*cultural capital is distributed unevenly in society, with wealthy families possessing significant quantities, while working-class and impoverished households have none.*” The transmission of cultural capital occurs within the family from birth, resulting in discernible disparities in its possession among different social classes by the time children commence their education. Bourdieu (1997) posits that the educational system, despite its facade of meritocracy, reinforces and magnifies preexisting inequalities. This phenomenon arises from a core collection of attitudes and values that give priority to those belonging to higher social levels. Furthermore, those with lower social status tend to purposefully disengage from the educational system due to their deeply ingrained patterns and behaviors. In essence, individuals with a higher degree of cultural capital are also more inclined to own greater quantities of economic capital (such as money, wealth, and property) and social capital (significant social connections). Bourdieu theorizes that persons who hold privileged socioeconomic situations pass on cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Chetwani (2020) asserts that individuals from affluent backgrounds possess a greater capacity to comprehend educational content in comparison to individuals hailing from marginalized groups. Madan (2007) depicts that Individuals hailing from households that place a greater emphasis on literature are more inclined

to achieve higher levels of scholastic accomplishment in the realm of schooling, as opposed to individuals with limited financial resources. The child's level of achievement would be evaluated according to their acquisition of cultural capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1997) posits that affluent parents possess the means to furnish their offspring with top-notch education, including enrollment in esteemed educational institutions and engagement in supplementary extracurricular pursuits. Lamont and Lareau (1988) contend that when individuals from disparate social classes exhibit cultural markers linked to elevated social standing, it results in the stratification and disparity between these classes, ultimately marginalizing some socio-cultural groups. Consequently, kids from lower socioeconomic origins exhibit discernible disparities in their academic accomplishments when compared to their counterparts from more affluent socioeconomic groups. According to Tricia Broadfoot (1990), individuals who possess different resources could deliberately or inadvertently disperse their holdings. Individuals lacking these 'capitals' will consistently encounter challenges in attaining success inside the system. According to DiMaggio (1979), children from various socioeconomic origins possess varying levels of "cultural capital," which is evident in their distinct skills acquired during basic socialization. Children from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds achieve academic excellence due to their early exposure to foundational knowledge. Individuals with cultural capital typically attain superior academic success. Bourdieu's (1984) theory examines the presence of a stringent structure that maintains and perpetuates inequality. According to Bourdieu (1997), educational institutions have a role in maintaining and legitimizing the social hierarchy through certain means. Children are significantly impacted by the unequal distribution of socio-economic resources and the interventions done by schools.

### **Cultural Capital And Educational Inequality In India**

Cultural capital is universally recognized as a pivotal element in perpetuating educational inequality on a worldwide level, and India is not an exception to this trend. Schools function as settings where the norms and values associated with higher socio-economic status groups are acknowledged and where the possession of cultural knowledge and skills is appropriately acknowledged and rewarded. Wealthy parents with significant affluence may demonstrate refined skills and behaviors that may not have direct practical applications, but serve as indications of their children's perception of their heightened cultural understanding and social status (Farkas, 2003). The research study indicates that a key objective of the NEP 2020 is to implement mandatory early childhood education. The inextricable link between schools and socialization is apparent, as teachers and students are inherently interconnected, influencing one another's behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, and customs. Bernstein (1971) argues that persons from different socioeconomic classes utilize different communication tactics. Empirical data indicates that individuals belonging to marginalized populations encounter prejudice on the basis of their caste and gender, in spite of the express restriction outlined in the Indian Constitution, which forbids educational institutions or organizations from engaging in discriminatory activities based on caste, creed, sex, or social standing. The Constitution of India considers it a grave violation to permit discrimination on any grounds.

### **The Ambition Of Equitable And Inclusive Educational Framework - National Education Policy (Nep) 2020**

The present research recognizes that the objective of NEP 2020 is to guarantee fair and impartial educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their birth circumstances or

background. The NEP 2020 is based on the fundamental principles of accessibility, equity, high quality, affordability, and accountability. Every person has an inherent right to be included in all aspects of society. The goal is to foster inclusiveness in all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender, physical ability, social standing, caste, income, and other variables. Inclusion refers to purposeful actions taken to promote fair chances and eliminate obstacles and instances of bias in public domains. Research acknowledges that NEP 2020 includes the educational curriculum for children aged 3 to 6, which was previously overlooked. The research illustrates that NEP 2020 places a high importance on promoting equal access and impartiality in education, specifically targeting the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged areas. “*Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups*” (“*SEDGs*”) can be classified into two main categories based on their gender identities and socio-cultural characteristics: females and transgender individuals. The NEP 2020 acknowledges the necessity of customized interventions for various groups and proposes initiatives such as establishing “*Special Education Zones*” (“*SEZs*”) and prioritizing female education to achieve substantial advancements in addressing overlooked areas and populations (Mondal, 2023). Society can be categorized into several categories according to their social identities, which encompass scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes (OBCs), and minority groups. Furthermore, individuals can be categorized based on their geographical provenance, encompassing pupils originating from rural areas, small municipalities, and regions. Additionally, while examining socio-economic aspects, it is crucial to examine migrating populations, low-income households, individuals experiencing difficult circumstances, orphans, mendicants, and the underprivileged residing in urban areas. In addition, the NEP 2020 emphasizes the crucial strategies for promoting equity and inclusive education to meet the needs of underprivileged communities. These methods include:

- Academic grants/ Scholarships and contingent monetary transfers
- Accessible environment
- Promotion of awareness
- The process of identifying and registering persons entails the act of verifying and formally recording the personal information of individuals.
- Providing transportation and support services, transit service
- Providing guidance and advice to teachers, parents or caregivers, and the general people
- Modifying and distributing instructional content and resources
- Assessment and remedial measures
- The advancement of existing efforts aimed at supporting underprivileged communities.

Multiple studies confirm that the NEP 2020 prioritizes the provision of nondiscriminatory and comprehensive education. The NEP 2020 recognizes the current shortcomings in the Indian education system and seeks to guarantee equal opportunities for education for everyone, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged households. According to Singh and Mishra (2023) “*the primary objective of NEP 2020 is to address the disparities in the availability, involvement, and educational achievements among underprivileged groups, such as marginalized communities, disabled children, and individuals in precarious circumstances.*”

## Conclusion And Recommendations

The objective of NEP 2020 is to develop an authentically democratic and ambitious education system in India by the year 2040. The primary objective of this method is to surpass the performance of all previous Indian educational systems and guarantee equitable and unbiased access to the highest quality education for all students, irrespective of their social and economic circumstances. The NEP 2020 places great importance on the value of equity and inclusiveness in India's education system. This aligns with the concept that education has the capacity to liberate individuals and it aims to produce engaged, competent, and productive individuals for a just and comprehensive society. Pierre Bourdieu highlights the importance of education in maintaining cultural capital and social disparities. The current investigation acknowledges that the NEP 2020 addresses these concerns well by promoting inclusive education, discouraging segregation, and emphasizing the use of several languages. Consequently, it hinders the perpetuation of injustices in education (Ranjan, 2023). The NEP 2020 is an innovative initiative that aligns with the viewpoints of educational professionals. The objective is to revolutionize education by advocating for rationality, inclusivity, and creativity, while simultaneously dismantling current frameworks in order to construct a system that enables individuals to transcend socio-economic constraints. The initial six years of human existence are crucial, as the pace of development during this period is more accelerated than at any other phase of growth. This age range is universally recognized as a crucial phase for the cognitive development of children. The NEP 2020's innovative effort to foster equality and inclusiveness has garnered praise from modern researchers. The following points are a few recommendations of projects and employment of various approaches to better investigate the impacts of the NEP 2020.

- Conducting comprehensive case studies on specific places or demographics to gain a thorough understanding of the local dynamics amongst NEP 2020, ECCE, and cultural capital. Analysis of the achievements and challenges faced during the execution of educational policies in different states or districts.
- Assessing Impact: In order to gauge the lasting effects of the NEP 2020 on educational achievements, especially in primary schools, it is recommended to carry out longitudinal research. Assessing the efficacy of ECCE programs in adequately preparing children for formal schooling.
- Community Engagement: Involve educators, parents, and local communities in the research process to get diverse perspectives on the state of education. Analyze community-based initiatives that either adhere to or challenge government-imposed educational standards.
- Instructors' Perspectives: Analyzing the opinions of local educators regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 and the Indian Early Childhood Education (ECE) policy. An analysis of how educators tackle disparities in cultural knowledge within the classroom and its impact on students' academic advancement.
- Technology Integration: Analyzing the integration of technology in the execution of educational policies. Analyzing the capacity of online learning environments and digital tools to enhance early childhood education outcomes by addressing disparities in cultural knowledge and resources.
- Comparative Studies: Conducting analyses that compare educational progress with other countries that have achieved significant achievements in the subject matter.

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