

## **REVISITING THE EDUCATION POLICY THROUGH GLOBAL LENS: EXPLORING THE MISSING AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY, 2020**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study highlights the intricate relationship between regional educational priorities and international reform initiatives by examining national and international education policy and framework. The analysis shows that different countries have different approaches. For example, Finland prioritises teacher professionalism and personalised learning with little standardised testing, the United States focusses on equity through standardised accountability measures, the United Kingdom maintains curriculum rigour with flexibility in implementation, and India prioritises holistic development and multilingualism in its National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Global frameworks headed by the World Bank, OECD, and UNESCO at the international level support common goals of equity, high-quality education, and lifelong learning through programs like the Education for All agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4. These organisations support 21st-century skills like creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy—all crucial for equipping students for a rapidly changing global economy—while facilitating policy transfer and benchmarking through tests like PISA.

This paper highlights important policy implementation issues, especially with regard to access to high-quality education in developing countries, where obstacles like political unrest, poor infrastructure, and poverty continue to exist. Due to inconsistent curricula, uneven funding, and differences in teacher preparation, educational quality gaps persist even in developed nations. Focus on integrating technology into education has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought attention to the digital divide that affects students in underserved and rural areas. Affirmative action in Indian education is a major topic of the analysis, which highlights conflicts between the larger Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG) framework of NEP 2020 and conventional reservation methods. The policy's efficacy in advancing true educational equity for historically marginalised communities is called into question by its failure to specifically address caste-based discrimination.

The study comes to the conclusion that although local contexts continue to shape national education systems, global viewpoints that support sustainability, inclusivity, and technological advancement are having an increasing impact. International best practices must be balanced with cultural relevance, sufficient funding, and a strong political commitment to guaranteeing that all students around the world have access to high-quality, equitable education.

Keywords: Education, Policy, Affirmative Actions, Globalisation, Caste

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The National and International Perspective on Education Policy and Framework highlights the differences and similarities in how education systems are structured globally, focusing on their goals, policies, and implementation strategies. At the national level, countries like India, United States, United Kingdom, and Finland have developed distinct education policies that reflect their societal values and priorities. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes holistic development, multilingualism, and the integration of technology, with a strong focus on inclusivity and vocational education. The United States, through policies like Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), strives for equity in education, emphasizing standardized testing and accountability across its states. The United Kingdom offers a rigorous national curriculum while maintaining flexibility for schools to implement localized teaching methods. Finland's education system is lauded for its focus on teacher professionalism, equality, and personalized learning with minimal reliance on standardized testing.

On the international front, global frameworks like UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) stress the importance of quality education, equity, and lifelong learning opportunities. These international initiatives aim to provide a shared vision of education, guiding nations in improving educational access and quality. Organizations like the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) also shape global education policies through assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and frameworks on 21st-century skills. Countries are increasingly integrating EdTech into their education systems, responding to the growing trend of globalization and digital learning platforms. At the same time, there is a collective focus on addressing challenges such as access to education, quality disparities, and the need for inclusivity, particularly for marginalized and underprivileged groups.

Despite the variations in national policies, there are common global themes such as educational equity, technology integration, and cultural inclusivity. However, the level of implementation varies due to differences in infrastructure, resources, and political will. Countries are also increasingly collaborating on education reform through international initiatives, sharing best practices, and engaging in educational diplomacy. In summary, while national education systems are shaped by local contexts, they are increasingly influenced by global perspectives that promote inclusivity, technological advancement, and sustainability in education.

As education systems evolve, the implementation of policies at both national and international levels faces several challenges. Access to quality education remains a significant issue, particularly in developing countries, where barriers such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and political instability often prevent children from attending school. Even in more developed nations, disparities in education quality persist, primarily due to inequalities in funding, teacher training, and curriculum standards. For example, the global south continues to struggle with providing adequate education due to limited resources, while richer nations focus on enhancing educational quality through advanced pedagogy and technology integration.

At the same time, the growing trend of globalization has led to the adoption of common educational frameworks that allow countries to benchmark their systems against international standards. This is evident in initiatives like the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which promotes global citizenship and academic excellence, and in cross-national studies like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures and compares the educational outcomes of students in different countries. These frameworks emphasize the need for 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy, which are becoming crucial for preparing students for a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, global efforts are increasingly focused on the integration of technology in education, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the importance of digital learning platforms and remote education. Countries worldwide are investing in e-learning tools, online courses, and digital resources to ensure education continuity and bridge gaps caused by physical classroom limitations. However, the digital divide remains a pressing issue, with students in rural and underserved areas often lacking access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity.

The sociocultural context of education is another area where global and national perspectives converge and diverge. Countries are placing greater emphasis on inclusive education and addressing issues such as gender equality, special needs education, and support for marginalized communities. For instance, countries like India have policies targeting gender disparity in

education and efforts to integrate students with disabilities into the mainstream educational system. Similarly, global frameworks like UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report advocate for equity, recognizing that equal opportunities in education are essential for sustainable development and social justice. The national and international perspectives on education policy and framework reveal a complex landscape shaped by local priorities, global trends, and universal challenges. While countries adapt their policies to suit their cultural, economic, and social contexts, there is a growing recognition of the need for collaboration, shared learning, and mutual support. As education continues to be a cornerstone for societal development, both at the national and international levels, the overarching goal remains to provide accessible, equitable, and high-quality education to all, fostering a brighter and more sustainable future for future generations.

### **1.1 EDUCATION**

The process of teaching people new information, abilities, and character qualities is known as education. With many advantages for people, communities, and the environment, it is both a fundamental component of development and a basic right. The quality and relevance of education have become key problems due to the rapid increase in population, and new demands are being felt at the post-primary and secondary school levels as well as at the vocational and technical training levels. Young people's increasing demand for access and the need to update the curriculum to meet the demands of economies that are constantly restructuring due to the challenges of modernisation and globalisation are putting a lot of pressure on education at all levels, but particularly on higher education.

A significant portion of the actions involved in creating policies and programs were seen as part of the educational planning process, according to the planning idea as it was generally understood in the 1960s. However, since then, the national and international conditions in which the developing nations' education reform and development programs were developed have changed substantially. The primary shifts include increased economic liberalisation, political regime democratisation (which is relative and varied), and the financial and economic crisis, which includes mounting debt. Their combination has shifted the scales on issues pertaining to international cooperation and the view of economic and social planning, whose usefulness has been questioned. In some countries, the practice of economic and social planning has even been abandoned. Traditional planning has been marginalised as a method of developing and executing development strategies in many nations due to the problems it has caused due to its centralised preparation and dogmatic conception.

First, an integrated ecosystem of varied educational institutions that can meet both local needs and desires to interact worldwide is required due to the rising urbanisation. Second, ensuring the quality of education entails avoiding micromanagement, overregulation, and standardisation while coming up with strategies to enhance quality in an ongoing cycle. Third, the quality of education must be cheap so that no student group will be denied entry because they cannot afford the tuition or fees. Fourth, the way educational institutions are governed has to change from interventionist to evaluative, and from direct control to indirect monitoring. Lastly, the rapid advancement of technology has not only raised the level of abilities required in the industry but will also be used to improve educational programs.

In order to improve how students learn, how courses are offered, how student learning is evaluated, how education finance is managed, how knowledge is accessed, and how students are prepared for the transition from school to university and from university to the workplace,

technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data and algorithms, facial recognition, biosensors, augmented reality, gamification, blockchain, cloud computing, and other undeveloped innovations can be leveraged (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2012)<sup>1</sup>.

### **1.1.1 Educational policy or legislation**

Educational policy or legislation is directly related to an ideal educational standard or model such as that which suits manpower requirements of the economy. It goes without saying that a number of innate factors, including socioeconomic shifts, influence education policy. Several stakeholders analyse, create, implement, evaluate, and redesign policies as part of a framework for educational policy analysis. This is known as the educational policy cycle. It is described as a tool for analysing the development of a policy item.

Globally, the education sector has been marked by shifting roles that are primarily impacted by regional priorities and local microeconomic shifts. Decision-making in the education sector has gone through several stages since independence. The Government of India established University Education Commissions in 1948, shortly after independence (Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Commission). India's literacy rate at the time of independence was 16.1%, according to the 1951 census, and women's education was severely underfunded. Following independence, education received a lot of attention. India's educational system was reorganised as a result of the 1949 report of the Radhakrishnan Commission.

The creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge are among the basic issues faced by the social universe in which we live. These days, knowledge and capital accumulation are characteristics of every society. It is impossible to separate the process of creating and acquiring knowledge from any society's overarching planning mechanism. Though its scope goes far beyond this to include the intellectual and social development of the individual and society, education is frequently associated with the production and accumulation of knowledge. Education is regarded as a social policy tool, both in terms of welfare policies and policies meant to address societal structure. In order to ensure accessibility, equality, democracy, quality, publicity, transparency, and collaboration within the education sector, educational policies stress that educational objectives must be in line with local circumstances. In both national and international contexts, education and its institutions are designed to function under a range of circumstances.

It has been believed that a nation's educational system can effect social change. It cannot be viewed separately from other important public policies, like those pertaining to the labour market and society. Additionally, education involves stronger ties to the fields of science, health, and environmental policy. These issues are closely connected. The ability of the education sector to clearly state its goals, show how these relate to broader social and economic developments, and find and implement cost-effective policies and programs is essential to improving the connections between education and other policy areas.

There exists a wide range of variation among scholars on the nature and scope of education policy. However, an education policy may be defined as:

- 1) A method used by any culture to address an issue related to education. It encompasses a society's stated goals and formal laws, as well as its regular trends of educational activity and inactivity.

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<sup>1</sup>Asian Development Bank (2012). Higher education in a dynamic Asia. Manila: ADB. [https:// www.adb .org/ publications/ series/ higher -education -dynamic -asia -study -reports](https://www.adb.org/publications/series/higher-education-dynamic-asia-study-reports)

- 2) The method by which governments (or society) convert their educational goals into initiatives and programs that produce results, or the intended changes in the actual world.
- 3) One decision, either explicit or implicit, or a series of decisions that may provide guidelines for directing future choices, start or halt activity, or lead the application of earlier decisions

According to experts, policy is consequently a plan of action as opposed to routine choices or activities. In order to proceed with the work of identifying the processes involved and the developing policies, it is more crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the governmental policy practices intended to promote desired social behaviour. Making choices about education in the areas of resource allocation and conflict resolution is the focus of policy-making. Establishing the educational system, choosing leaders, outlining the plan of action, and specifying how to run educational matters are all part of it.

Therefore, educational policy will address the anticipated results of the government or organisation. It is meant to influence the 'real' world by directing the choices that are made from there. The majority of organisations have well defined policies, whether or not they are officially stated.

### **1.1.2 Historical Background:**

In Indian culture, education has always been valued. India has had educational institutions since the beginning of civilisation (Keay, 1972)<sup>2</sup>. The education policies of pre-independence India can be further separated into two eras: British and pre-British. Ancient India's educational policies are not supported by any reliable literary artefacts. The main goal of education in ancient India was religion. In pre-British India, religious education was prioritised over all other subjects in both Hindu and Muslim educational institutions (Yechuri, 1986)<sup>3</sup>.

The advent of western education during the British era had a big influence on how India's educational policy developed. Missionaries, who supported education for those living under British control, carried out the first work in this area (Keay, 1972). The British administration passed a number of charters to advance education in India. Woods Education Dispatch, also referred to as the "Magna Carta of English Education in India," introduced a significant overhaul to the Indian educational system (Singh, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Woods Dispatch was significant because it cleared the way for Indian universities to be established. The first Indian university in modern India was Calcutta University, which was founded in 1857. Then came the establishment of the universities in Bombay and Madras (Mukharjee, 1976)<sup>5</sup>.

The Sargent Commission was established in 1944 to advance the British government's educational system. In recognition that the standards of education in an independent India would differ, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) intended to form two commissions after independence, one focussing on university education and the other on upper secondary education. When India ratified its constitution in 1950, its main goals were social fairness and "equality in opportunity for education for all." Dr. S. Radhakrishnan led the ten-member University Education Commission of 1948, which was tasked with reporting on university

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<sup>2</sup>Keay, F.E. 1972. A History of Education in India. Oxford University Press. Delhi.

<sup>3</sup>Yechuri, Sitaram. 1986. Educational Development in India. Social Scientist. No. 153-154, Vol.14, No.2 & 3

<sup>4</sup>Singh, V. N. 2005. Education in India: From Earlier Times to Today. Vista International Publishing House. New Delhi.

<sup>5</sup>Mukharjee, S. N. 1976. Education in India: Today and Tomorrow. Acharya Book Depot. Vadodara.

education in India and proposing a beneficial system to meet the nation's present and future needs (Aggarwal, 1993)<sup>6</sup>.

The international community strongly supported national planning in the 1960s. In the 1990s, it turned its focus to the development of national education policies after decades of supporting educational planning. They are currently regarded as a significant factor in the process of development. Therefore, this text specifically refers to the "preparation of policies and action programs" and the variety of national practices in this area rather than "educational planning" in the broadest sense.

The panel suggested that universities be established in India to offer higher education to all segments of society, irrespective of gender, caste, religion, or geographic location. In its report, the commission stressed the need to reconstruct the educational system in accordance with the Indian Constitution's goals. In 1952, a Secondary Education Commission headed by Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar was established to advance secondary education. In its report, the committee recommended both diversifying school curricula with technical educations and promoting uniformity in school education throughout India. Nevertheless, the framework for advancing women's education was absent from this panel. The Indian Education Commission, led by D.S. Kothari, came before the Secondary Education Commission. The Kothari Commission is a common name for this commission. The Kothari Commission was charged with addressing every aspect and area of education and giving governments the suggestions they needed to change the National Education System.

In 1968, India implemented its first national educational policy based on the commission's recommendations. In 1986, the second national educational policy was introduced, and it underwent additional revisions in 1992.

The ideology of the ruling party and the pledges made during the election campaign and platform are certain to have an impact on government choices pertaining to education. Despite the fact that election-related promises and manifestos have very little influence over government choices, in certain nations the manifesto is the driving force behind the government.

The majority of political parties in India have pledged to increase the budgetary allotment for education to 6%, but none of them have followed through on this pledge since taking office. For the first time, education has received sufficient funding from the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. In the event that funds are unavailable for the construction of school buildings, teacher salaries, and other facilities, one sector will have to take precedence over others.

Higher education (HE) has been prioritised over other industries ever since independence. It must be explored why the government chose to allocate the most funds to the Higher Education sector out of the four sectors—Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, and Research. The primary sector received some attention at first, but secondary and then higher education quickly took front stage. One could claim that children's chances of attending secondary school and HE are eliminated if they do not attend primary school. Since independence, scholars and intellectuals have maintained that the government should make every effort to provide every child with a respectable facility that is within reasonable travel distance for them to pursue elementary education. However, it wasn't until the early 1990s that we discovered any noteworthy government policies or programs.

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<sup>6</sup>Aggarwal, J.C. 1993. Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi

As a result, educational reform and policy have grown incredibly complex. With a post-pandemic world still trying to find its footing, there is a renewed pressure to re-examine the education policy enterprise in many nations. Prioritising education for the global common good is part of a historical trajectory that calls for a more pluralistic understanding of the “good” as including all social categories, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. What implications does this have for educational policy?

To improve the Indian educational system, the government has now developed a third new education policy (NEP, 2020). In order to bring about change and holistic development in education, the 34-year-old education policy was replaced by the new one in 2020. Reforming education is political labour, and political labour can only be properly comprehended from a historical and cultural standpoint. Reforms inevitably occur in certain institutional, political, social, and economic situations<sup>7</sup>. Any reform program’s conception, development, defence (and opposition), and execution will be heavily influenced by past practices and events in a particular jurisdiction. Here are some examples to help clarify. All new reform initiatives are conditioned by the legacy of social class differences in Britain, which includes a long history of elitism in education (Whitty & Edwards, 1998)<sup>8</sup>.

The argument over ideas like parental choice or opting out of grant-maintained schools takes place in a system that has historically offered educational opportunities mostly based on socioeconomic status. However, in the United States, racial relations concerns have shaped discussions on the same topics just as effectively as class concerns. Concerns over choice are somewhat less prevalent in Canada, where there is a long history of distinct but coexisting institutions based on language and religion. In Canada, the phrase “separate but equal” has a very different meaning than it does in the US. Language, religious, and ethnic politics can all have a significant impact on education, and they are heavily influenced by the particular historical circumstances of each place.

The inclusive education chapter by Yulia Nesterova is equally important. Nesterova points out that because educational systems are inherently uneven, inclusive education policies frequently place an undue emphasis on educational access, which may only serve to further oppress already marginalised pupils.

In order to solve the policy dilemma of how to make education truly inclusive when access is achieved, Nesterova proposes a justice framework. According to Nesterova, social justice is a framework that may be used to examine how material and non-material resources are distributed, power dynamics in relationships, and the issue of who is in charge in schools and why. Jisun Jeong, who studies the effects of social-emotional learning (SEL) in nations afflicted by crises, similarly views expanding inclusivity in connection to high-quality education as a crucial problem. This study focusses specifically on the Lebanon situation. Jeong uses three theoretical frameworks to analyse SEL in crisis-affected nations: policy mobilities, critical political economics, and policy borrowing and lending theories. Jeong discusses worldwide awareness of SEL, the impact of global players, and policy conundrums that have arisen during crises. Jeong outlines three challenges that arise when attempting to put into practice a social justice-focused

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<sup>7</sup> Kalyani, P. (2020). An Empirical Study on NEP 2020 [ National Education Policy] with Special Reference to the Future of Indian Education System and Its effects on the Stakeholders. 7(5), 1–17.

<sup>8</sup>Whitty, G., Power, S. & Halpin, D. (1998). Devolution and choice in education: The school, the state and the market. Buckingham: Open University Press.

SEL agenda. The first is a problem of accountability and making sure that outside resources are getting to the people who are most affected by the crisis.

The second is a localisation conundrum, where local government policies may not correspond with national government goals and may find it difficult to reconcile local expectations, national ambitions, and outside funds. Jeong concludes by pointing out that SEL itself frequently runs the risk of being overlooked in more comprehensive Education in Emergencies responses, which are frequently a component of more extensive multi-sectoral responses that concentrate on the provision of essential services. Jeong emphasises the necessity of explicit policies in each of these instances to guarantee that SEL is not overlooked in the more extensive and intricate policy contexts that are shared by national governments, local organisations, and foreign funders. The following constitute the historical context of international education policy:

**Comparative education:** studying various national educational systems in order to create global educational frameworks. Although this idea originated in antique Greece, William Russell coined the phrase in 1826.

- **International education:** International efforts that sought to further education, learning, and intellectual interchange are connected to the development of international education as a field.
- **Expansion of compulsory education:** Compulsory schooling for everyone has been gradually but significantly expanded since around 1855.
- **Expansion of public education:** Primary and secondary schools have been progressively financed and run by national and subnational governments since the early 19th century.
- **Education for All (EFA):** Following a summit in Jomtien in 1990, this international policy agenda was decided upon. EFA seeks to eradicate social disabilities and combat prejudice and marginalisation.
- **Comparative and International Education Society (CIES):** The CIES was established in the United States in 1956 with the goal of promoting intercultural understanding by researching educational theories, methods, and systems.
- **Comparative Education Society of Europe (CESE):** founded in 1956, five years after the CIES, in London.

## 1.2. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN INDIAN EDUCATION

Affirmative action in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India's most ambitious educational reform since independence, reveals a complex tension between traditional reservation mechanisms and progressive inclusivity.<sup>9</sup> Centuries of caste-based discrimination and social exclusion were addressed by the affirmative action framework in India, which was mandated by the constitution through reservation policies.<sup>10</sup> Caste and ethnicity-based disparities in income, work, and education are significant in Indian society.<sup>11</sup> 15% of seats in higher education institutions and state and federal government jobs are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under compensatory or positive discrimination policies, with additional

<sup>9</sup> Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Education.

<sup>10</sup> Deshpande, A. (2013). Affirmative Action in India. Oxford University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Bertrand, M., Hanna, R., & Mullainathan, S. (2010). Affirmative action in education: Evidence from engineering college admissions in India. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(1-2), 16-29.

reservations for Other Backward Classes.<sup>12</sup> Studies reveal notable increases in enrolment rates among underserved communities, indicating that these policies have had a quantifiable effect on educational access. Research shows that 98% of professors and over 90% of assistant or associate professors at higher-tier IITs and the IISc are from privileged castes, indicating that affirmative action's effectiveness decreases at higher educational levels. Nevertheless, persistent challenges still exist. Whether India's most recent educational framework effectively addresses the systemic injustices that initially required affirmative action is a crucial question raised by the way the NEP 2020 handles these well-established mechanisms.

### **1.2.1. The Approach of NEP 2020: The SEDG Framework and Its Consequences**

Through its conceptualisation of "Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups" (SEDGs), which unifies gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions under a single framework, NEP 2020 introduces a paradigm shift.<sup>13</sup> Despite being administratively effective, this strategy has come under fire for possibly downplaying the particular historical injustices that various communities have experienced. Since social inclusion policy in higher education—also known as affirmative action, reservations, schedules, or antidiscrimination—has been widely implemented across numerous national contexts, the policy's emphasis on SEDGs reflects global trends in affirmative action policy.<sup>14</sup> Targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers, bicycle distribution programs, and the creation of Special Educational Zones (SEZs) in underprivileged areas are just a few of the creative interventions that the NEP suggests. Recognising the compounded disadvantages faced by women and transgender students, it also establishes a Gender-Inclusion Fund exclusively for them.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, detractors contend that the broad classification of the SEDG framework ignores the particular structural obstacles that particular communities must overcome.<sup>16</sup> "The policy does not recognise caste as a historical inhibitor and does not prescribe the need for reservations,<sup>17</sup>" as stated in the original document. This omission is especially noteworthy because caste is still a major factor in determining educational success and access in India. Research continuously shows how Dalit students face prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes on campus because of their caste identity.<sup>18</sup>

### **1.2.2. Important Gaps: The Silence Regarding Discrimination Based on Caste**

The main complaint against NEP 2020 is that it does not adequately address caste-based discrimination, which is still a major issue in Indian education.<sup>19</sup> Concerns concerning whether the NEP sufficiently addresses discrimination, social bias, and historical disadvantages affecting

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<sup>12</sup> Weisskopf, T. E. (2004). *Affirmative Action in the United States and India: A Comparative Perspective*. Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> National Education Policy 2020, Chapter 6: Equitable and Inclusive Education.

<sup>14</sup> Gururaj, S., Somers, P., Fry, J., Watson, D., Cicero, F., Morosini, M., et al. (2021). Affirmative action policy: Inclusion, exclusion, and the global public good. *Journal of Education Policy*, 36(4), 567-589.

<sup>15</sup> Rao, M., & Sharma, K. (2021). Gender inclusion fund and transgender rights in Indian education. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 18(1), 67-89.

<sup>16</sup> Thorat, S. (2021). Caste and educational inequality in contemporary India. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 15(1), 78-95.

<sup>17</sup> Sahoo, N. (2020). *Equitable and inclusive vision in the National Educational Policy 2020: A Critique*. Observer Research Foundation, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Kumar, A. (2024). Unequal Spaces: An In-depth Analysis of Caste Discrimination in Indian Universities. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 16(2), 234-251.

<sup>19</sup> Chauhan, P. (2020). NEP 2020 and the silence on caste-based discrimination. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(38), 23-27.

students from marginalised caste backgrounds are raised by the policy document's lack of explicit references to "caste".<sup>20</sup> A fundamental conceptual gap in the policy's approach to educational equity is reflected in this omission, which goes beyond simple semantics. From covert social exclusion to overt discriminatory practices, research continuously shows that caste-based discrimination in educational institutions occurs through a variety of mechanisms.<sup>21</sup> Even in schools, female students—particularly those from lower castes—are tasked with cleaning the restroom, demonstrating how intersectional identities exacerbate disadvantages.<sup>22</sup> The NEP's inclusive goals are compromised by its failure to specifically address these realities. Additionally, the policy deviates from India's constitutional commitment to compensatory justice by remaining silent on affirmative action mechanisms like reservations. The policy maintains constitutional reservation provisions, as Education Minister has explained, but there hasn't been any meaningful discussion about bolstering these mechanisms, which suggests a reluctance to address the structural nature of caste-based exclusion. Studies showing how caste-based discrimination in Indian education focusses on the issues faced by scheduled caste students at various educational levels support the ongoing significance of caste in educational outcomes. The NEP's strategy runs the risk of sustaining what academics have dubbed "colourblind" policies, which disregard systemic injustices in the name of advancing universal inclusion.

### **1.2.3. Implementation Difficulties and International Comparative Views**

Similar to international discussions regarding the efficacy of affirmative action, the ambitious inclusion agenda of NEP 2020 faces formidable implementation challenges. Important information about the relative effectiveness of various strategies for educational equity can be found in international research. When explicit race-conscious policies were in place, affirmative action raised under-represented minority enrolment by more than 20%, whereas other strategies had less noticeable effects. According to this data, addressing structural inequalities may be more successfully accomplished through the explicit recognition of group-based disadvantages as opposed to universally applicable inclusive measures. Although novel, the NEP's suggested interventions lack the targeting and specificity that studies show are essential for significant effect. For example, considering India's limited educational infrastructure, the policy's emphasis on alternative education for students with disabilities seems unrealistic. "Most teachers are poorly trained for such special assignments" and "most of India's schools are grossly understaffed," according to the original document. The difficulties in converting policy goals into educational realities are reflected in these implementation gaps. According to decades of research in higher education, classmates of the direct beneficiaries of affirmative action also benefit, according to the global literature on the practice. This suggests that targeted interventions have positive externalities that benefit entire educational communities. However, the NEP's broad-brush approach may fail to generate these benefits by not adequately targeting the most disadvantaged groups. Although the establishment of SEZs under the policy is a novel geographic approach to educational equity, these zones run the risk of becoming symbolic rather than revolutionary interventions in the absence of precise identification and implementation criteria.

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<sup>20</sup> Velaskar, P. (2016). Theorising the interaction of caste, class and gender: A feminist sociological approach. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 50(3), 389-414.

<sup>21</sup> Arcidiacono, P., & Lovenheim, M. (2016). Affirmative action and the quality-fit trade-off. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 54(1), 3-51.

<sup>22</sup> Holzer, H., & Neumark, D. (2000). Assessing affirmative action. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 38(3), 483-568.

#### **1.2.4. Moving Towards a Stronger Framework for Affirmative Action**

In India's approach to affirmative action and educational equity, the NEP 2020 signifies both advancements and setbacks. The policy's emphasis on inclusive education and acknowledgement of various forms of disadvantage show progressive thinking, but it falls far short in addressing caste-based discrimination and bolstering current affirmative action procedures. Despite being administratively convenient, the SEDG framework runs the risk of hiding the particular historical injustices that called for community-specific interventions. Research continuously shows that affirmative action policies to promote diversity are effective, albeit contentious, globally, but that they require targeted interventions and the explicit acknowledgement of group-based disadvantages in order to be effective. The NEP's ability to address systemic inequalities in education is compromised by its unwillingness to engage meaningfully with India's long-standing reservation system. Going forward, India's educational policy framework needs a more sophisticated strategy that blends enhanced affirmative action procedures with the creative inclusion measures of the NEP. Caste-based discrimination would be explicitly acknowledged, inclusive interventions would have clear implementation plans, and strong monitoring systems would be in place to guarantee that aspirational policy objectives are realised in the field of education. In the end, the policy's ability to address the ingrained social hierarchies that still influence educational access and results in India will determine how well it promotes true educational equity. The most marginalised communities in India will have to continue their fight for educational justice within systems that are still essentially exclusionary if the NEP doesn't take action to address the structural injustices it claims to address.

#### **1.3 EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE AT GLOBAL LEVEL**

The examination of education policy and practice globally reveals a complex tapestry of innovations and reforms that reflect various cultural, economic and political references. As the nation recognizes education as an important driver of rapid economic competition and social development, the comparative analysis of educational systems has become necessary to understand their transfer in effective policy mechanisms and their transfer in various contexts.

The globalization of education has created unprecedented opportunities for ease, policy learning and transfer by international organizations such as UNESCO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank, which have promoted standardized framework and evaluation mechanisms. However, the effectiveness of policy borrowing and credit depends significantly on relevant factors, institutional capacity and cultural alignment, making comparative analysis important to identify the best practices and possible implementation challenges.<sup>23</sup>

In 2022, China introduced a new English Language Curriculum, mandating changes to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. While empirical studies underscore ITE's crucial role in driving curricular reform, less is known about the factors influencing teacher preparation programme effectiveness in response to curriculum changes.<sup>24</sup>

China's English curriculum standards clearly "stimulate the authenticity of learners and to develop their self-regulative learning". This structure emphasizes the Metacognitive Strategy,

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<sup>23</sup> Carnoy, M. (1999), *Globalisation and Educational Reform: What planners need to know*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>24</sup>Fengmei Zou & Cui Zhiyu et. al. (2024), *Analysis of China's English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education from the Perspectives of Self-regulated Learning*

Target-Special and Self-Observations methods that enables students to own their learning process.

Similarly, India's NEP 2020 “tries to provide quality education to transform citizens into a more uniform and rich literary community, while removing the gaps between current education with high quality, equity and integrity”, basically promoting autonomous education. The policy advocates flexible, multidisciplinary education that promotes complex thinking and self-directed investigations.

Both policies recognize that traditional teacher-centered approaches are inadequate for 21st century learners. Research suggests that “integrating Self-regulated learning in a curriculum can improve engagement and effectiveness in teaching English as a foreign language” recognizes the theoretical foundation shared by both educational structures.

China's standards include Metacognitive awareness by reflective methods in English education, while India's NEP emphasises qualification-based assessment and experimental education that naturally promotes self-regulatory skills. Both policies acknowledge that autonomous learners need a systematic course design to develop, which feeds self-regulatory behaviors through secondary education.<sup>25</sup>

Developing nations, particularly Least Developed Countries, frequently rely heavily on foreign knowledge, resources, and funding (Rose 2007)<sup>26</sup>. External players, such as foreign NGOs, donor agencies, and International Organisations (IOs), are actually more prevalent in low-income situations. These entities have a significant amount of material and conceptual power to establish national objectives and agendas. In this regard, the policy environments of these nations are far more permeated than those of nations with more developed economies, albeit the present financial crisis and the manner in which it is being handled in many European nations calls into question this assumption. Furthermore, from the perspective of policy transfer, developing nations rely on limited capacity to moderate supranational policy demands in addition to being the target of a more intense flow of external pressures (Grek et al. 2009)<sup>27</sup>.

Globalisation outlines new issues that education policy must address and produces new inputs for policymaking (Ball 1998)<sup>28</sup>. The global reorganisation of labour and the employment market's evolution stand out among them. In a global economy, the majority of nations want to increase their competitiveness abroad by providing knowledge-intensive goods and services as well as new types of workers. As a result, they broaden education and ground its procedures and contents in competencies, abilities, and the idea of flexibility (Carnoy 1999)<sup>29</sup>.

Globalisation, or the “idea of globalisation” (see Hay 2006), changes welfare states' ability to directly provide and fund education as well as their ability to use education policy to address issues related to education and non-education<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Dhotre, S. (2024). National Education Policy 2020: A Blueprint for Self-reliant India.

<sup>26</sup> Rose, P. M. (2007), Supporting Non-state Providers in Basic Education Service Delivery, paper commissioned by DFID Policy Division. Brighton: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE). Research Monograph 4/2007.

<sup>27</sup> Grek, S. (2007), ‘Governing by numbers: the PISA Effect’. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24, (1), 23 – 37.

<sup>28</sup> Ball, S. J. (2007), *Education Plc: Understanding Private Sector Participation in Public Sector Education*. New York: Routledge

<sup>29</sup> Carnoy, M. (1999), *Globalisation and Educational Reform: What planners need to know*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>30</sup> Hay, C. (2006), ‘What's Globalisation Got to Do with It? Economic Interdependence and the Future of European Welfare States’. *Government and Opposition*, 41, (1), 1–22.

The function of international organisations in formulating educational policy is being revitalised by globalisation. The World Bank, the OECD, and UNESCO are notable examples of international governmental organisations (IOs) having a clear or implied role in education. Globalisation does, however, also introduce new international actors into the formulation of educational policy, the majority of which are nongovernmental and include transnational advocacy coalitions, transnational companies and foundations, international consultants, and epistemic communities.

The acceleration of the international circulation of policy ideas is made possible by the advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which are both a cause and an effect of globalisation (Peck et al. 2010)<sup>31</sup>. By lowering the expenses of cross-border distance learning, for example, ICT is also changing educational practices and delivery patterns. Additionally, a transnational private education market is created by globalisation, which either competes with or supplements national education providers. Some of the fundamental roles of traditional educational institutions, such “nation building,” are put to the test by this new global market (Robertson et al. 2002)<sup>32</sup>.

Many of the prevailing views in education policy are framed by neoliberalism, which is today the dominant political-economic ideology in the globe (Ball 2007). Proposals like liberalising and privatising the education system, introducing market procedures and logics (choice, competition, decentralisation), and importing management practices from the business sector are all in line with neoliberal ideology.

Transnational social justice groups that fight for the acceptance of education as a human right and its realisation as a global public benefit are facilitated by globalisation. These movements also challenge the above-described neoliberal global education agenda. The Global Campaign for Education is the most notable organisation in the field of education for development with these goals (Mundy et al. 2001)<sup>33</sup>. Crucially, civil society movements are not the only ones responding to the spread of neoliberal policies. Similar coalitions of nation-states, like the ALBAi nations in Latin America, are advocating for a counter-hegemonic regional education agenda that includes elements like the so-called decolonisation of the curriculum or increased state involvement in education (Muhr 2012, forthcoming)<sup>34</sup>.

### **1.3.1 Approaches for education policy and programme elaboration**

National practices in terms of education policy and program construction differ according to a number of potential approaches and processes, depending on the variety of the political and institutional contexts:

1. Transitioning from a centralised to a decentralised approach, encompassing many methods of decentralising the development and implementation of educational policies and initiatives;
2. Transitioning from a technocratic to a participative method;

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<sup>31</sup> Peck, J., and Theodore, N. (2010), ‘Mobilizing policy: models, methods, and mutations’. *Geoforum*, 41, (2), 169–174.

<sup>32</sup> Robertson, S., Bonal, X. and Dale, R. (2002), ‘GATS and the education services industry: The politics of scale and global reterritorialisation’. *Comparative Education Review*, 46, (4), 472-496.

<sup>33</sup> Mundy, K. and Murphy, L. (2001), ‘Transnational Advocacy, Global Civil Society? Emerging Evidence from the Field of Education’. *Comparative Education Review*, 45, (1), 85-126.

<sup>34</sup> Muhr, T. (2012, forthcoming), *Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas (ALBA) and Counter-Globalisation: Resistance and the Construction of 21st Century Socialism*. New York: Routledge.

3. A systematic, sectoral strategy that seeks to guarantee an articulation between the many forms of education within the sector, as opposed to a sub-sectoral or partial approach that concentrates on a specific component of education. In addition to studying political issues that transcend the educational framework but have an impact on its reform or development, such as the institutional and legal aspects of decentralisation, fiscal issues, employment and wage policies, etc., the preparation may restrict itself to purely sectoral issues or adopt a systemic multi-sectoral vision.
4. Moving from a purely educational approach to a more comprehensive one that addresses global education policy and the execution of the projects and programs. Furthermore, the elaboration may be restricted to a broadly defined plan of action and/or implementation strategy, or it may also cover the elements pertaining to the conception and methods of carrying out the projects and programs. Therefore, topics pertaining to the making of political choices at the highest level of the State or more specific administrative concerns can be addressed more or less thoroughly in the creation of education programs and policies.

The methods that nations employ to construct their educational policies and programs have mostly changed in three ways over the course of development planning history: Many developing nations set up planning systems in the 1960s to construct social and economic development plans or programs using the “traditional” approach. This preparation focused on education just as much as the other sectors, and the formulation of policies and programs for education development largely followed the same pattern as that which is often recommended for the planning of the growth of other social and economic sectors. Of the several sectors, education was one that adhered to the national work structure. Only a small number of nations currently employ conventional planning after the fall of traditional planning in emerging nations and the Communist regime crises.

A second group consists of nations that have experienced severe economic and financial crises, war-related destabilisation, or social and political crises that have caused people to distrust government policies and give up on any preparation. They have to deal with the situation every day. Planning has been abandoned for two reasons: the perception that political solutions are the only way to resolve such profound issues, and the perception that technocratic planning as a tool for guiding policies has lost much of its credibility. For this reason, technocratic solutions have, at least temporarily, lost ground to political administration of public affairs.

Following the end of the severe crisis, the majority of the affected nations started to develop and carry out reconstruction and reform plans for important areas like education, both for domestic political reasons and to secure funding from donors who required them to agree on possible educational policies. As a result, these nations abandoned their old planning systems and used new procedures to develop sophisticated education policies and programs that were unrelated to the old methods. The process of creating a new education policy and the program it encompasses is quite different and more difficult to handle politically in unusual situations that necessitate significant revisions. The pressures of the development partners, who impose a variety of requirements before they can participate in the sector’s funding, and the fact that education is at the centre of national issues create the challenge here.

Depending on the economic and social sectors as well as the social or political events, sectoral plans of a prospective and fairly suggestive nature are developed here using different processes and for different time periods. Lack of coordination and a globally expressed vision of social and

economic growth to maximise intersector synergies is a common flaw. Therefore, the durability of education programs is hampered by their closer association with political shifts, particularly a change in the government or a minister.

This second group includes a third scenario or subgroup: nations that implemented planned economies after experiencing financial and economic crises. Having previously used strict and dogmatic planning, they now recognise the benefits of substituting a modern and future planning approach for conventional planning. As a result, many nations employ flexible planning in terms of financial and policy alternatives. They make use of pragmatically developed indicator programs. What is crucial is the ability to govern while balancing two demands: on the one hand, the necessity of directing development by defining the primary goals of policies and programs, and on the other hand, maintaining the option to move forward with adapting these programs in accordance with the changing circumstances.

### **1.3.2 Policies at the International Level**

National and institutional policies are impacted by the nature and consequences of globalisation in both direct and indirect ways. Global organisations like the World Bank, UNESCO, and SAARC are promoting worldwide policies that target education and the use of new technology. Such institutional structures influence nations and organisations to approve international decisions by offering resources, incentives, and power. For instance, by providing infrastructure, the World Bank has assisted a number of developing nations in their efforts to modernise their educational systems. On the other hand, there are professional groups and worldwide organisations dedicated to promoting and assisting with different educational policies. The ways in which educational policies alter attitudes, values, and interests and impact how well schools, colleges, and universities provide quality education at a reasonable cost are the subject of heated dispute. International development organisations, national education ministries, and local governments have seldom interpreted excellence in a systematic manner. There is a strong emphasis on skills, school-business collaboration, and internships as the discussion over investments that help students get ready for the workforce after graduation heats up. Schools, colleges, and universities must remain mission-focused on education, market-smart rather than market-driven, and margin-conscious about efficiency, regardless of national trends and pressures of centralisation and decentralisation. In light of these concerns, an overview of education and its function in various civilisations is necessary for the study of educational policy. The comparative research by William K. Cummings (2003) serves as a reminder that educational practice is rooted in the institutionalised norms and aspirations of an educational system rather than in the amount of money spent or the number of participants. According to Cummings (2003), we should be mindful that there is power in comprehending the context of civilisation rather than assuming that good educational practices are essentially the same everywhere.<sup>35</sup>

#### **❖ *Investing in Teachers and School Leaders***

Establishing high, universal standards is a crucial first step, but standards do not implement themselves. For children to meet high standards and for schools to advance, it is essential to recruit, retain, and assist excellent teachers and school administrators. Numerous nations have taken action to improve the calibre of their teaching personnel. Deliberate policy decisions are what lead to a high-quality teaching workforce, not some nebulous cultural regard for educators. In order to strengthen their human resource systems, high-performing nations focus more on

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<sup>35</sup> Cummings, W. K. (2003). *The institutions of education: A comparative study of educational development in the six core nations*. Oxford University Press.

hiring, training, and assisting qualified teachers than they do on lowering teacher attrition and dismissing subpar instructors. Additionally, they systematically find and develop leadership potential. With the aim of giving every kid the same excellent teacher we would want for our own, there is a lot of innovation taking place globally in this field. Examples of global best practices and essential components of an all-encompassing system include:

**Recruitment:** In Singapore, the top one-third of the secondary school class is used to choose future teachers. Strong academic credentials are important, but so is a dedication to the field and to working with a diverse student body. During their training, trainees are paid 60% of a teacher's pay and are required to teach for at least three years. Singapore also hires people in their mid-career because they think students benefit from their professional experience. Through its "gardeners project," China also places a lot of emphasis on finding qualified applicants to teach. It also provides scholarships to young people living in rural regions so they may pursue teaching careers there. After two rounds of screening, just 10% of candidates are admitted into teacher preparation programs in Finland, where teaching is currently a highly sought-after career. Rather than being viewed as a technical application of externally enforced standards and assessments, teachers' job must be viewed as an autonomous and valued profession in order to attract the most talented young people to become teachers. The teaching profession was elevated in England through a number of measures, including the use of bonuses to entice teachers to commit to teaching in high-need communities, the introduction of alternative school-based pathways into teaching to compete with traditional university teacher training programs, the recruitment of new candidates through a sophisticated advertising campaign, and the promotion of teaching through television teacher awards programs. As a result, after five years, teaching rose from 92nd to the top of the list of job choices. Compared to the United States, where attrition rates for teachers in their first five years of teaching can exceed 50% in some places, all of these nations have far lower attrition rates among new teachers due to their emphasis on recruiting and induction into the profession.

**Teacher preparation:** The greatest answer and the worst issue are both found in teacher education. The methods used to modernise teacher education differ significantly. Traditional teacher training programs are recognised and appreciated in China, Singapore, and Finland, and institutional frameworks are modified to meet evolving skill requirements. In Canada, reformers disregarded teacher education institutions because they were seen to be too difficult to alter and instead concentrated on the professional growth of already-employed educators. The change strategy in England aimed to compete with conventional suppliers and provide alternative pathways. The need to prepare students for the global context and the "21st century" skills of creativity and problem-solving, as well as the importance of using data and assessment to guide instruction, are all factors that teacher preparation programs are emphasising from the very beginning of training, regardless of the institutional foundation.

**Professional Development:** Malcolm Gladwell claims that a professional must work at their job for about 10,000 hours before they feel proficient at it. Therefore, for teaching and learning to be effective, constant professional growth is necessary from the beginning to the end. The challenge is how to connect successful professional development programs to the school's curriculum while doing it on a large scale for all instructors. One of the main components of the literacy and math programs in Canada and England was the centrally planned professional development sessions. Professional development is closely linked to school improvement objectives in the Australian province of Victoria. Weekly teacher research groups that

concentrate on classroom development have a long history in China. In Singapore, where 100 hours of professional development are provided annually, instructors choose their own professional development requirements. In Finland, however, teachers choose their own professional development needs. Singapore's policy approach of "teach less, learn more" frees up time in the school day for professional development, as well as planning and working with students outside of the classroom, to allow teachers to engage in profound improvement of their practice. In general, instructors in Asia and Europe devote more time to professional development, giving students personalised feedback, and working together to identify issues and create solutions rather than teaching courses. Greater class sizes are typically the price paid for this.<sup>36</sup>

**Compensation and Evaluation:** International research indicates that in order to draw top-notch graduates to teaching as a vocation, entry-level pay must be approximately equal to that of other positions that hire recent graduates. Working circumstances, such as being regarded like a professional, having the chance to collaborate with others, and having the impression of a career ladder, appear to be more significant than pay in and of itself as one moves past the entry level. In many nations, there is a large deal of variance in the methods used to assess teachers, including who evaluates them, how they are evaluated, and whether evaluation is linked to any reward. Principals typically conduct assessments, which may cause instructors to become hostile if they don't think the assessment is grounded in actual teaching practice knowledge. On the one hand, Finland and Canada have lengthy discussions on student development with their principals and teachers, but they do not think there is empirical evidence to justify merit pay schemes. In contrast, Singaporean and Chinese educators are rewarded for their achievements. Every year, a number of individuals evaluate teachers' performance in Singapore based on a variety of criteria, such as how well they teach, how well they work with parents and community organisations, and how well they contribute to their peers and the school overall.

**Teacher Distribution:** This issue becomes somewhat inconsequential for nations like Finland that have a consistently strong profession. Larger nations must, however, take teacher distribution seriously. China hires instructors for its rural schools by providing scholarships to those living in rural regions. In addition to earning 10% more, teachers in rural areas could also be able to afford housing. Through the use of satellite television, the internet, and the division of schools into clusters with a single resource centre for supplies and support, they obtain long-distance professional development. The majority of young Australians choose to live on the coast, hence the federal government of Australia also offers financial incentives for teachers to work in rural regions. Bonuses for teaching in urban schools with limited staffing are a widespread practice worldwide.

**Principals:** The majority of nations are creating national standards while simultaneously giving schools more responsibility for achieving them. This has raised awareness of how crucial it is to hire and educate potential principals effectively. In addition to creating programs for future leaders and peer support systems for new head teachers (principals) throughout their first two years, England has founded the National College of School Leadership. Based on leadership training methods used in other industries and nations, China has two major university-based centres for school leadership: one for primary schools and one for secondary schools. These centres provide current principals intensive executive training sessions. For prospective leaders, assistant principals, and principals, the Australian state of Victoria has created a methodical set

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<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

of leadership development options. In Singapore, teachers with leadership potential are recognised early on and promoted to middle management and assistant principal positions with related training and experiences. After that, aspiring principals attend the National Institute of Education's Leaders in Education program for six months. A project to redesign a portion of their existing school and a two-week journey to see a noteworthy innovation in another country are part of the principal training program, which focusses on innovation and school transformation<sup>37</sup>.

Teachers' roles are evolving. It is now required of teachers to assist all children succeed, not just those that are "easy to teach," to adapt to and use new technology, to teach higher order cognitive abilities, and to train knowledge workers rather than factory workers. We will require even better instructors in the future than we did in the past because of all these factors. The current policy of recruiting a large number of teachers to lower class size has shown to be an ineffective educational investment; instead, there may be a need for a more differentiated labour force with fewer, higher quality, and better compensated instructors.

#### 1.4 CONCLUSION

The intricate relationship between national priorities and international reform initiatives is revealed by this thorough examination of education policy through a global lens, highlighting both convergent trends and enduring disparities that influence modern educational landscapes. Despite having developed unique educational frameworks that reflect their respective socio-cultural contexts, the study shows that nations like Finland, the United States, the United Kingdom, and India are increasingly navigating similar challenges related to equity, quality, and technological integration under the influence of international organisations like the World Bank, UNESCO, and the OECD.

The examination of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 serves as a critical case study that illuminates the tensions between progressive inclusivity aspirations and traditional affirmative action mechanisms. Although the policy's implementation of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG) framework is administratively effective, it signifies a paradigm shift that may lessen the severity of the historical injustices faced by marginalised communities based on caste. This study highlights a basic contradiction: NEP 2020 promotes creative inclusion strategies like Special Educational Zones and Gender-Inclusion Funds, but its glaring silence on caste-based discrimination betrays its failure to address systemic injustices that still exist in Indian schools.

The global comparative analysis emphasises that universal frameworks and policy borrowing alone are insufficient for effective educational reform. Countries that have made great strides in education, like China's weekly teacher research groups, Finland's minimal standardised testing, or Singapore's strategic hiring of top tertiary graduates as teachers, show that effective policies must be rooted in local contexts while still being responsive to demands for global competency. According to the research, the most important factor influencing educational success in a variety

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<sup>37</sup> National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve Inc, "Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education," 2008. <http://www.achieve.org/files/BenchmarkingforSuccess.pdf>

of national contexts is still the calibre of the teaching workforce, which can be achieved through careful hiring, thorough training, ongoing professional development, and suitable pay plans.

According to the study, the COVID-19 pandemic has sped up the integration of technology in the classroom while also drawing attention to the digital divide, which disproportionately impacts students in underserved and rural areas. The need for technology and the increasing focus on 21st-century competencies like creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy call for a fundamental shift in pedagogical approaches from teacher-centered to learner-centred approaches that encourage independent study and self-control.

Significant implementation issues that cut across national borders are identified by the study, such as poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, unstable political environments, and enduring quality differences between urban and rural educational offerings. These issues are especially severe in developing nations, where reliance on foreign organisations and donor agencies creates complicated policy environments that might not always be in line with local priorities and needs.

This study promotes a more sophisticated method of developing educational policies going forward that strikes a balance between cultural relevance, contextual appropriateness, and international best practices. For India in particular, this entails creating a more complex framework that incorporates the creative inclusion measures suggested in NEP 2020 and expressly acknowledges caste-based discrimination. To guarantee that aspirational goals are translated into measurable educational outcomes, the policy framework must have strong monitoring systems, well-defined implementation strategies, and sufficient resource allocation.

In the end, achieving high-quality, equitable education calls for consistent political will, sufficient funding, and cooperative strategies that acknowledge education as a basic human right and a vital component of sustainable development. Any educational policy's effectiveness will be evaluated based on its ability to address the structural injustices that continue to prevent the most marginalised groups in the world from accessing education, not on how comprehensive it is theoretically. Educational systems can only realise their transformative potential in fostering more inclusive and equitable societies by taking such dedicated action.