



Educational Empowerment of Women: Evaluating the Provisions of the National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

The female population of any nation contributes significantly to the welfare and development of society. Therefore, it is essential to ensure meaningful and equitable education for all girls so they can actively participate in social progress. Although various educational policies have been introduced to support girls' education, dropout rates among them remain high at different stages. The National Education Policy-2020 recognizes the importance of women's education and emphasizes empowering them in multiple dimensions of life. The policy proposes several measures to provide quality, equitable, and inclusive educational opportunities for women. Drawing on secondary data, this paper examines the importance of empowering women through education within the framework of National Education Policy-2020 highlighting its key initiatives aimed at promoting holistic and progressive women's education in India.

Key Words- Educational Empowerment, Women Education, Provisions of National Education Policy-2020

Introduction

Education plays a decisive role in shaping an individual's overall quality of life, well-being, and ability to participate meaningfully in society. The fundamental purpose of education is to provide learners with relevant knowledge, essential skills, and constructive attitudes that contribute to their intellectual growth and personality development. A strong and inclusive education system is central to the balanced progress of any nation, as it helps eliminate social disparities, reduce long-standing inequalities, and cultivate a more harmonious society. By nurturing confidence, broadening perspectives, and fostering personal development, education enables individuals to become responsible citizens capable of contributing positively to both community and national progress. For this reason, it becomes essential that education reaches every

individual without discrimination based on gender, culture, or socio-economic background. Numerous studies have highlighted the significant contributions made by women in national development, especially in social transformation and economic progress. When women are provided with equitable and quality education, the nation benefits through their enhanced participation in various spheres of life.

Access to meaningful education allows women to develop the capability to make informed decisions, engage in productive economic activities, participate in political processes, and involve themselves actively in social and cultural domains. As women gain educational empowerment, their standard of living improves, and their sense of dignity and self-worth strengthens, leading to higher levels of subjective well-being. Recognizing the importance of educating the girl child, both central and state governments have introduced numerous initiatives such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana and the Girl Child Protection Scheme. Additionally, various financial supports and incentives have been implemented to motivate girls to continue their schooling. However, despite these efforts, issues such as low enrolment, high dropout rates, and poor retention among girl students continue to persist. These challenges highlight the urgent need for focused strategies that ensure women have access to equal, meaningful, and high-quality educational opportunities. Strengthening women's education is therefore not only a matter of social justice but also a crucial pathway to building a progressive, equitable, and prosperous nation.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the significance of women's empowerment through education within the framework of the National Education Policy-2020.
2. To analyse the special provisions and initiatives introduced in National Education Policy-2020 aimed at promoting holistic and progressive education for women in India.
3. To explore the educational implications of National Education Policy-2020 in enhancing and advancing women's education across the country.

4. To offer practical suggestions for the effective implementation of National Education Policy-2020 recommendations related to strengthening women's education.

Women education

Women's education serves as a crucial indicator of a nation's social and economic progress. Ensuring educational opportunities for women is essential for addressing gender inequality and eliminating various social barriers that hinder the overall development of society. When women receive quality education, a nation not only achieves higher literacy levels but also experiences a significant rise in economic productivity. Education enhances women's awareness of their social, economic, and political rights, enabling them to exercise these rights confidently and effectively. Educating women is fundamental to empowering them in all dimensions of life. An educated woman can contribute meaningfully to the well-being of her family and can play a transformative role in the advancement of the larger community. Thus, promoting women's education with sufficient and accessible educational resources becomes a vital national priority. To ensure that women and girls receive equitable, inclusive, and quality education, the government has introduced and revised several policies and programmes, aiming to provide them with barrier-free access to learning opportunities and encouraging them to pursue higher studies without constraints.

Special Initiatives on Women's Education under National Education Policy-2020

The National Education Policy-2020, formulated by the K. Kasturirangan Committee and approved on 29 July 2020, emphasizes the creation of an equitable and inclusive education system for all learners. While the policy envisions quality education for every child, it places particular focus on girls belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Several key initiatives introduced in the policy aim to strengthen and promote women's education in India. The major initiatives are outlined below-

1. Setting up a Gender Inclusion Fund

National Education Policy-2020 proposes a Gender Inclusion Fund to support girls and transgender students by ensuring adequate financial and educational resources for equitable, quality learning.

2. Ensuring Equitable Quality Education

The policy emphasizes equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of background, to reduce discrimination and promote a safe, inclusive learning environment.

3. Addressing Local Barriers

National Education Policy-2020 calls for innovative strategies to tackle local challenges such as physical distance, socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, and gender stereotypes to improve enrolment, access and retention of disadvantaged students.

4. Providing Hygienic Toilet Facilities

Recognizing that lack of sanitation discourages girls from attending school, the policy stresses the need for clean, safe toilets in all educational institutions to improve enrolment and retention of female students.

5. Offering Free Hostel Facilities

The policy supports providing free hostel accommodation for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those who travel long distances, to ensure uninterrupted schooling.

6. Enhancing Leadership Skills in Girls

National Education Policy-2020 focuses on developing communication, decision-making, reasoning skills, and positive attitudes among girls to strengthen their leadership abilities and empower them in various social and professional spheres.

7. Ensuring 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio for Girls

National Education Policy-2020 aims to achieve a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio for girls in school education by 2030. To meet this goal, the policy introduces targeted measures to boost enrolment, reduce dropout rates, and ensure universal access, retention, and affordable learning opportunities for all girl students.

8. Providing Bicycles to Girls

To overcome mobility issues and reduce gender-based barriers, the policy supports providing free bicycles to girl students. This initiative helps them travel safely to school, thereby reducing early dropout caused by lack of transportation facilities.

9. Increasing Female Leadership in Institutions

National Education Policy-2020 encourages greater representation of women in leadership positions such as principals, teachers, and wardens. This not only motivates girl students but also helps break gender stereotypes. Measures like leadership training, incentives, improved recruitment, and crèche facilities for women educators further strengthen women's leadership roles in education.

10. Promoting Gender Equity in Rural Recruitment

The policy seeks to address gender imbalance in teacher recruitment, especially in rural areas. From 2030 onwards, recruitment will be based on the Integrated Teacher Education Programme ensuring merit-based selection while creating more opportunities for women teachers.

11. Training Female Facilitators for Counselling

National Education Policy-2020 highlights the need for training teachers and female facilitators, including Anganwadi workers, to counsel families effectively about girls' education. Such counselling helps ensure regular attendance of girl students and bridges the gap between educated children and their less-educated family members.

12. Special Education Zones

National Education Policy-2020 proposes Special Education Zones to support socially and economically disadvantaged groups, including children with disabilities. These zones aim to improve access, provide necessary accommodations, and ensure effective implementation of educational schemes through targeted interventions and proper resource allocation.

13. Ensuring Safety and Security of Girl Students

The policy stresses creating a safe and secure environment for school-going girls both inside and outside the campus. Schools are required to follow guidelines that prevent

harassment and discrimination, ensuring a supportive atmosphere that encourages attendance and participation.

14. Mandatory Awareness Programmes

National Education Policy-2020 directs educational institutions to organize awareness programmes and extension activities to build students' confidence, improve academic skills, and support holistic development. Such initiatives also help boost school retention, especially among girls.

15. Reducing Gender Gaps in Literacy

The policy focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education through the Gender Inclusion Fund and aims to achieve 100% GER for girls. It promotes gender equity, discourages stereotypes, and works toward building a gender-inclusive society.

16. Introducing Gender-Responsive Curriculum

National Education Policy-2020 recommends implementing a gender-responsive curriculum to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal access, participation, and opportunity for girls. It also emphasizes training teachers in gender-sensitive pedagogies to address diverse learning needs effectively.

Implications of National Education Policy-2020 on Women Education

1. Increased GER for Girls

National Education Policy-2020 aims to steadily raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio of girls at all educational levels, targeting a 50% GER in higher education by 2035, up from the current 26.3%.

2. Reduced Dropout Rates

Through Special Education Zones, the Gender Inclusion Fund, and better access to open and distance learning, the policy seeks to significantly reduce dropout rates among girls, particularly from disadvantaged groups.

3. Minimizing Gender Stereotyping

The policy promotes equal educational opportunities and introduces measures to identify and eliminate gender biases, helping reduce stereotyping and discrimination that restrict girls' access to education.

4. Higher Literacy Levels

National Education Policy-2020 aims to boost women's literacy by providing financial support, hostel facilities, hygienic toilets, and transportation measures that improve enrolment, attendance, and motivation among girls.

5. Increased Participation

The policy encourages greater participation of women in all areas of education, helping them develop essential skills, realize their potential, and contribute meaningfully to educational and societal development.

6. Strengthening Women Empowerment

National Education Policy-2020 promotes women's empowerment through skill development programmes and extension activities. These initiatives aim to make women self-reliant and confident, enabling them to contribute to national progress and helping society adopt more positive attitudes toward women.

7. Provision of Quality Education

National Education Policy-2020 aims to strengthen women's self-efficacy, confidence, and self-respect by ensuring high-quality education. By promoting effective teaching methods and inclusive learning environments, the policy supports equity and personal growth, especially for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.

8. Economic Development

The policy encourages internships for all students to build practical skills and workplace readiness. This enables girls to gain hands-on experience, preparing them to contribute effectively to the country's economic growth.

9. Enhancing Students' Potential

National Education Policy-2020 focuses on developing the full potential of every learner. Through innovative teaching strategies and skill-based learning, girls can enhance their knowledge, life skills, and ability to participate in the growing knowledge economy.

10. Scholarship Benefits

The policy provides scholarships to help girls pursue education without financial burdens. These scholarships motivate academic achievement, reduce opportunity costs, and support girls in excelling both academically and professionally.

11. Reducing Discrimination and Bias

Despite legal safeguards, girls still face discrimination. National Education Policy-2020 emphasizes legal literacy and awareness about rights, ensuring that girls are better protected and more confident in accessing education.

12. Ensuring Safety and Security

To increase attendance and participation, the policy prioritizes the safety of girls within and beyond school premises. It calls for identifying social barriers that restrict girls' education and creating a secure, supportive environment.

Suggestions for Improving Women's Education in the Context of National Education Policy-2020

1. Strengthen Access to Education

Ensure effective implementation of grassroots government initiatives to universalize primary and secondary education for girls.

2. Strengthen Regulatory Measures

Establish efficient monitoring systems to assess the status of women's education and take timely corrective actions.

3. Ensure Women's Representation

Mandate a fixed proportion of women's participation across different sectors to promote inclusive national development.

4. Promote Positive Attitudes

Improve societal attitudes towards the girl child and link government schemes with educational opportunities, especially in rural and urban disadvantaged areas.

5. Adopt Region-Specific Approaches

Use a targeted segment-based strategy to address local challenges in women's education and develop special zones to promote educational, cultural, and economic growth.

6. Include Self-Defence in Curriculum

Introduce self-defence training as part of the school curriculum to enhance girls' safety and confidence.

7. Mainstream Gender Sensitivity

Integrate gender-sensitive issues into school curricula at all levels to eliminate gender bias and cultivate equality and fraternity among students.

8. Ensure Quality Education and Nutrition

Schools must follow guidelines of the Women and Child Development Ministry to maintain girls' nutrition and provide a healthy learning environment.

9. Offer Career Counselling

Provide structured career guidance for girls to help them explore opportunities aligned with their interests and abilities.

10. Enhancing Digital Access

Provide free or affordable digital devices, Information Communication Technology tools and reliable internet connectivity to help girls access quality digital learning and expand their knowledge base.

11. Ensuring Proper Nutrition

Ensure adequate nutrition for girls so they remain healthy, focused, and active in academic activities. The draft National Policy for Women Empowerment also prioritizes quality education and nutrition for girl students.

12. Promoting Girls' Participation in Sports

Make sports participation compulsory for girls at all education levels to support their physical and mental development, contributing positively to their overall educational progress

Conclusion

Women's education is vital for the nation's economic, social, and cultural development. The National Education Policy-2020 is a major step toward promoting women's education and empowerment by introducing provisions aimed at achieving gender equality and improving access to quality learning. The policy encourages collaboration between states and local communities to strengthen the education

system. By addressing key barriers faced by girls, the study highlights essential steps for improving educational opportunities and ensuring that women receive equal, accessible, and quality education, enabling them to participate fully and equally in all spheres of society.

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