

EDUCATION AS HUMAN CAPITAL VS. EDUCATION AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: Within the contemporary discourse of education policy, education is being brought up as an investment of the economy that has become more and more placed as a means of enhancing the employability, productivity, and national competitiveness of society. This has been a special concern inspired by the Human Capital Theory and has been particularly looked at in the case of policy reforms of the Global South, such as in India. Meanwhile, another and equally significant tradition will define education as a means of social change and the idea of education as equitable practices, democratic practices, critical consciousness, and human agency. The essay is a policy analysis of such paradigms in competition in the modern Indian educational scene driven by theory and critically which examines the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Having assigned a research design grounded in a qualitative and conceptual analysis, the study is related to the classical and recent education approaches, including Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and the Capability Approach offered by Amartya Sen. The analysis reveals that despite the NEP 2020 being based on normative commitment to holistic development, inclusion, and transformative learning, the institutional imperatives and the operation processes are tightly connected with the economistic and market-related logics. The paper argues that that structural imbalance is in danger of strengthening, instead of diminishing, any social inequalities that already exist. The paper concludes by proposing an eclectic conceptual framework that brings relevance of the economy and social justice, positioning education as an extension of human capabilities and an instrument of democratic social change in the Indian grossly unequal socio-economic status.

Index Terms - Education Policy, Human Capital Theory, Social Transformation, NEP 2020, Educational Equity, Capability Approach.

1. Introduction

Education has had a long tradition of being the means of universal or national development of the society. Over the last several decades, education policy globally has been subject to increased impacts of economic logic of employability, skills formation, and quantifiable performance outcomes. This trend in the education policy-based economy is consistent with growing significance of Human Capital Theory, according to which education is viewed as the investment in national economic growth and productivity (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). It is the efficiency, returns, and alignment to the labour market then that are considered to be the main educational value dimensions. But underlying this economistic disposition is a persistent and major tradition which perceives education as a radically transforming social practice. It is based on the progressive and critical thought of education but has the focus on the importance of education in fostering critical consciousness, democratic citizenship, ethical reasoning, and social justice (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). Rather than conceptualising learners as future economic actors, the tradition explains learners as social and political actors who can challenge and transform the situation in which they exist. The clash between the two theories of education, education as human capital and education as social transformation has been brought into the limelight in the Indian context in some sense. The educational system in India is based on a socio-economic world, which is full of inequalities of caste, class, gender, region, and language, which are long-lasting and intersecting. The priorities of the policy, as well as economic development and labor market readiness, should be high but a sole emphasis on the educational outcomes of the market may obscure the structural background that makes education available, accessible, and achievable to the large proportions of the population. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India is the largest education policy in more than thirty years and a critical location to gauge such tension between the two. On the one hand, the policy has a vision of holistic development, multi-disciplinary learning, critical thinking, and constitutional values. Simultaneously, there is also the vocationalisation and skill formation, industry-academia connections, and output-based performance measures in the agenda. This is a critical question of analysis: How far does NEP 2020 genuinely inspire education as a radical social project as opposed to its reifying human capital as a reform? But, NEP 2020 is not regarded as a neutral or technical policy document but a paper filled with ideology and affected by the global and national discourses on economics in this study. This paper is a critical policy analysis contrary to the policy success or failure terms in the previous study of the implementation policy, which challenges the policy and questions its assumptions, normative commitments and structural priorities. The paper also seeks to make a parallel of NEP 2020 in the competing theoretical paradigms,

Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Capability Approach, to trace the ideological hierarchies in values of the existing education policy in India. The key argument of this paper is that, despite the fact that NEP 2020 expresses transformative educational aspirations at a rhetorical level, the rationalization of this vision still to a significant extent is targeted at economic calculation. The paper argues that this imbalance has denied the policy the opportunity of fulfilling the promise it holds on structural inequality and Indian education democratic deficiencies. In order to address this dilemma, this paper presents an integrative conceptual orientation, combining economic relevance, and social justice, which holds education as the evolution of human capabilities and starting point of social transformation into democratic forms.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Education policy is never a theory free area and it is motivated by unspoken assumptions concerning the purpose of education as well as the type of learners and expectations of the type of society that should emerge during the process of education. This section places the analysis within three important theoretical frameworks, Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and the Capability Approach, not as separate or contrary works of literature, but as approaches that articulate distinct normative orientations towards education and development.

2.1. Education as Human Capital

Human Capital Theory emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a response to economic concerns regarding productivity, growth, and workforce efficiency. Pioneered by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), this theory defines education as a resource to be used to increase people's productivity and national economic development. In this context, the value of education is derived almost entirely from its instrumental nature, derived from improved employability, higher wages, and better employability and therefore increased labour market competitiveness.

Human capital reasoning is a human resource-driven rationale in policy contexts that often operates under the lens of skill-biased curricula, competency-based learning, standardised assessment, outcome measurement and quality of learning. Performance measures, efficiency metrics, and alignment with the labour market needs and interests are now the new measures of success for educational organisations. This approach has had an impact in expanding access and rationalising education planning, but at the same time has narrowed down the meaning of education by subordinating societal, ethical and democratic purposes to those of economic utility.

Human capital logic has assumed new importance in India in the post-liberalisation world, strengthened by globalisation, demographic dividend narratives and the borrowing of policies from the globe. Education policies are now perceived largely in terms of their role as a remedy for unemployment and economic stagnation and as the future economic actors from whom learners primarily benefit in providing for growth-oriented development.

2.2. Education as social transformation: Critical Pedagogical Theories

Critical and progressive educational traditions understand education as a force for social transformation as opposed to economic frameworks. Building on the work of Dewey (1916) and Freire (1970), this vision highlights that education is instrumental for generating critical consciousness, democratic participation and social freedom. From this view of education, it is no longer just about teaching and training or informing, but that people learn how to critique the distribution of power, resist social injustices and take an active part in democratic life.

Critical pedagogy rejects, in no uncertain terms, the idea of flattening the individual learner into mere objects to which "they" are directed or as an economic product. It, instead, positions learners as agents with the ability to reflect and act (i.e., praxis). Pedagogical relations are conceptualised as dialogic rather than hierarchical, and knowledge is assumed to be socially constructed and politically located within them. In such unequal societies as India, such a tradition emphasises the obligation of education to address structural inequalities (like those found in caste, class, gender, and language) rather than recreating them through institutionally-based practices that purport to be neutral.

But while transformative educational aspirations are commonly invoked in policy discourse, they rarely get truly institutionalised. Critical pedagogy without assessment regimes, teacher education models, and governance structures becomes something less than rhetorical endorsement instead of something systemic.

2.3. An Integrative Framework of the Capability Approach

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach provides a normative frame that provides an analytical link between economic and social analysis of education. To the latter, Sen (1999) rejects narrow economism and abstract idealism, and positions development as expanding substantive freedoms and the real opportunities people have to live lives they value. In this light, education is not just a pathway to increased wealth or employment, but rather is a basic capability that will improve individual agency, participation and choice in several contexts of life.

The capability approach when applied to the education policy focuses on constraints and the resources (input, output, returns) needed in order people to be in a position to be able to access the relevant education to use productively. This perspective is concerned with the implications of social arrangements, institutional arrangements and power relations on the educational outcomes in terms of learning. The ethical component of this approach is even more convincing in the way of reinforcing the role of dignity, equality, and democratic involvement as central issues of education since it has been retold by Martha Nussbaum (2011).

The capability approach is somewhat a remedy to the dominance of logic of human capital in the Indian policy situation. It recognises economics as a key element of what an education policy is, but at the same time insists that education policy be judged based on its contribution to freedom, social justice and democratic life. So, instead of locating human capital and social

transformation as mutually exclusive, the capability framework represents a means to embed the function of the economy within a larger, normative vision of human development.

2.4. Synthesising the Frameworks

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks shed light on the ideological disputes within current educational planning. Human Capital Theory emphasises efficiency, productivity, and economic returns; Critical Pedagogy focuses on emancipation, democratic agency, and social justice; and the Capability Approach seeks to reconcile with these concerns, recasting education as an extension of substantive freedom. Drawing on all three traditions, this research analyses the normative assumptions and structural imperatives of NEP 2020 while also arguing that without capability-oriented rebalancing, transformative educational aspirations would have to remain subordinate to economic imperatives.

3. Education Policy in India: The Case of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been the broadest redefinition of the education landscape in India over the last three decades. In its marketing as an alternative to the prior policy regimes, the policy aims at addressing long-term issues with regard to quality, equity, access, and relevancy in all levels of education in the nation. However, besides the rhetoric of reforms, the NEP 2020 reflects a difficult and even contradictory policy course that has to be examined seriously. NEP 2020 is voiced with the broadly progressive vocabulary on the discourse level. It dwells on: holistic development; multidisciplinary learning; critical thinking; constitutional values; and inclusive education. Apparently, these commitments are consistent with a revolutionary inquiry into education that restyles learning as ethical, social and democratic and not simply technical or economic. These recurrent invocations of flexibility, creativity, and learner-centred pedagogy merely contribute to this impression of the paradigm shift, which is one and done, in the systems of rigidity and examination. However, scrutiny of the very policy reveals that these transformative dreams coexist and in numerous ways collide with a strong orientation of human capital. The NEP 2020 particularly emphasises vocationalisation as well as the development of the skills, the ability to work in the labour market, and connections between education and industry, making the education not only a key factor in driving economic development but also preparing the labour market. Outcomes based evaluation, performance indicators and accountability systems are taking a center stage as important tools of guaranteeing quality, according to the managerial and market driven educational governance practices. This results in uneven policy ground. Despite that the aims of change are outlined in the context of vision and purposefulness, the instruments of change practically that the policy will be implemented - which relate to curricular restructuring, assessment, teacher training, and administration of institutions - are largely congruent with economic rationales. Social justice, democratic participation, and critical pedagogy are weakly institutionalised and appear without structural support in the policy context. For instance, the emphasis on flexibility and choice is frequently couched as a strategy to increase individual competitiveness and employability, not as a way to tackle structural inequality. Likewise, inclusion is often framed in technical terms, in terms of access, enrolment, and engagement, rather than in real terms of the socio-economic contexts that limit learners' capacity to transform their chances of educational success into real lives. Equity here is perceived as an administrative issue instead of one that transforms politics. Moreover, the policy's focus on standardisation, benchmarking, and performance indicators has the potential to entrench hierarchies that exist in the education sector. This makes the institutions, teachers and learners of these schools increasingly be held accountable for evaluative frameworks that prioritise measurable outputs, which limit pedagogical autonomy and limit critical dialogic, contextually meaningful pedagogical practices. The disciplines/pedagogies that are not easily congruent with labour market needs, including humanities and social sciences, are subtly excluded from this framework. The NEP 2020 must also be placed in a wider global frame of reference, one that prioritises global politics of competitiveness, efficiency, and skills alignment. International policy borrowing and global economic imperatives influence national reform agendas, leading to a reduction in educational perspective. In this context, the transformative discourse of the NEP 2020 will have a tendency in some cases to act as a legitimising discourse that underplays the structural nature of the human capital logic to the exclusion of its challenge rather than to challenge it. Accordingly, this paper contends that the NEP 2020 does not represent a break with economic education policy so much as a rearrangement where transformative visions are used to talk it rather than to think it. The policy's ability to make social transformation inroads is further limited by underlying normative assumptions regarding development, productivity, and value through which the policy operates. In the absence of concerted shifts towards capability expansion, democratic involvement and structural equity, the transformative promise of NEP 2020 will probably not materialise.

4. Conceptual Framework: Reconciling Human Capital and Social Transformation in Indian Education Policy.

The theoretical framework that the study constructs is supposed to unveil the ideological and structural contradictions on which the educational policy in India is rooted. Instead of perceiving education policy as a technocratic or technologically neutral endeavor, the framework locates education policy as a field of struggle over rival normative imaginings of education, development and social order. The framework, in particular, the NEP 2020, involves the way global economic factors and national policy priorities and theoretical paradigms are interconnected with each other to produce unequal educational results. This framework places the Indian education policy in the global political economy at the macro level. The influence of the globalisation process, the state-based market-oriented reforms, the discourses of the demographic dividend and the like processes have a very far-reaching effect on the agendas of the national policy. These forces prefer education systems which prefer skills development, employability, productivity and international competitiveness. Since in this context, human capital logic is the main policy logic, this process affects the objectives of education which are being identified, evaluated and implemented according to human capital.

NEP 2020 plays a key role of a mediator in the framework. It is at both ends of aspirational ideology and institutional execution, not only describing and defining the transformational vision of education but also setting market-compatible operational forces. On the surface level, the policy promotes dedication to full development, critical thinking, multi-disciplinary learning and advocacy of

constitutional values. However, when they are moved into the language of curriculum structures, assessment policies and governance systems, they tend to be reframed around the language of efficiency, accountability and market-relevance. It brings inequality in the educational system in the country. The irony is that one of the pathways suggests that policy processes that are based on the imperatives of human capital such as vocationalisation, outcome-based assessment and industry-academia interconnections continue to reproduce social reproduction. These mechanisms, via their idealisation of standardised credentials and market-implemented skills, have the dangers of embedding the existing differences in caste, class, gender, place and language. The main sorting and stratification institution of this pathway is education, the process that justifies the inequalities of results with the help of so-called meritocratic standards. The transformative power of education is yet to be realised in another road. Equity, inclusion, democratic citizenship and critical consciousness are policy objectives that are occasionally emulated but not firmly institutionalized. Managerial governance suppresses pedagogical autonomy, teacher education is guided by technical compliance and not critical reflection and testing practices reduce chances of dialogic and participatory learning. Consequently, only loosely institutionalised and rhetorical are transformative objectives. Within this conflicted policy space, the capability perspective is placed in the framework as one of the critical corrective perspectives as well as an integrative perspective. By reframing education as a form of fundamental ability, as Sen (1999) conceives the idea of development as the process of augmenting the substantive freedoms, we do not present education as a process of labour market insertion but as a process that has agency, participation and democratic participation implication. More importantly, the capability approach is not an abandonment of economic imperatives, but puts them in a broader ethic context of respect to human dignity, freedom and social justice. In emphasizing the conditions in which people can turn educational commodities into opportunities, the capability lens highlights the poor quality of the policy frameworks through which the inputs and outputs of education are diminished. It underscores the mediating effects that social dynamics, institutional arrangements and power relations play in shaping educational outcomes, most notably in marginalised communities.

Thus, the framework provides a normative foundation for assessing education policy beyond efficiency and performance metrics. In this article, the integrative model put forward proposes a way of reorienting education policy in such a way that economic relevance and social justice are at equilibrium, with the promise of economic contribution, and therefore supporting positive consequences that ultimately lead to positive social justice outcomes. It seeks to understand education as serving productive capability and democratic transformation at the same time, even as the latter does not usurp the former. The framework lays the conceptual basis for realising the transformative aspirations articulated but inadequately operationalised through NEP 2020 by embedding capability expansion at the heart of policy design and evaluation.

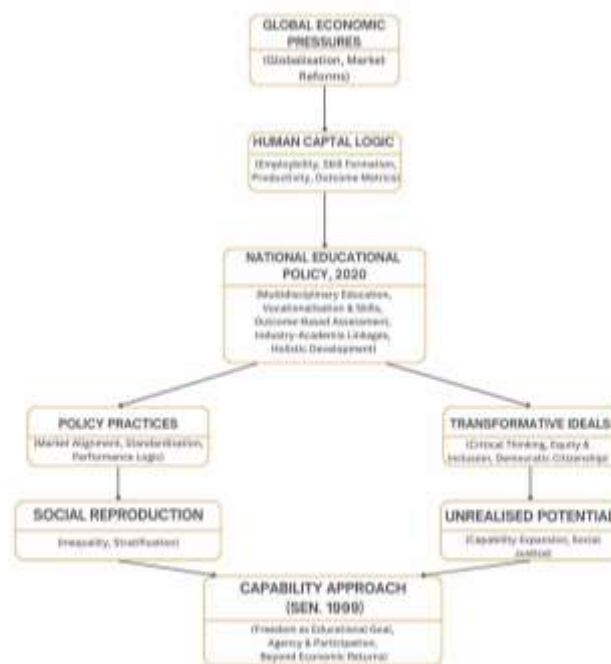


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the tension between human capital logic and social transformation in Indian education policy.

Figure 1: Figure 1. A conceptual framework to guide the interplay between human capital logic and social reform in Indian education policy (Source: Own conceptualisation, 2026).

5. Critical Analysis in the Indian Context

The way that we think about education policy, particularly human capital, becomes more meaningful in a country like India, one characterised by deep social divisions. Yet whilst we know that this can lead to economic development and develop a skilled workforce, we ignore the social barriers that have their roles in getting access to education and how well they succeed. Caste, class,

gender, regional differences, and language inequalities, among others, are not minor; they are the foundation of the education system. When we design policies that would make students feel like they are not part of these social realities we stand a risk, however, of merely boosting inequality instead of combating it.

5.1. The shortcoming of human capital thinking

The human capital policy is very narrow in terms of inequality as it is now a matter of individual competency and not the fact of historical and social circumstances that created inequality. This view, nevertheless, also considers the personal effort and talent to be the determinant of success whereby failure is viewed as a personal failure. Though this sounds like merit-based accounts, it does not take into account the fact that resources and opportunities are unevenly allocated which predetermines the further path of a student education even prior to his or her appearance in a classroom. The underprivileged students in India are disadvantaged by their systems, through low quality of schools, and language barriers as well as access to technology. A policy of education that makes standardized testing and performance parameters the main priority redefines these structural difficulties as personal differences in ability. Therefore, education does not foster an upward mobility; it imposes social orders.

5.2. The Limits of Standardisation in Education

Standardisation desire, accountability and performance standards have a potential to cap the transformational capacity of education. Despite the fact that these strategies are assumed to make maximum use of efficiency, they restrain the experience and accessibility of the students, schools and educators. The activities in curriculum and teaching start with a focus on what is easier to measure, and less to be learned, significant, context-based learning. To most, standardisation is discriminatory, not considering different languages, local knowledge and first hand experience. This leads to a situation where education turns alienating rather than empowering, especially to individuals who do not have some experiences that are represented in the textbooks in the dominant cultural discourse.

5.3. Inclusion Without Real Change

The inclusion and equity are frequently mentioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, yet the concerns have been confined to access and participation. However, the process of increasing enrollment will not give rise to the actual change in case the circumstances under which we encounter the knowledge is not resolved. When inclusion is a mere procedure issue, then we have no right to question the hierarchies that are involved and they permeate every education set up. Gender norms, caste discrimination, and the digital divide remain to be issues that disrupt the educational results and marginalize a large number of students. Without those institutions that oversee the redistribution of resources, responsive teaching to the diverse cultures, and accountability, the education policy is threatened to simply offer formal inclusion and do not confer any actual power to students at all.

5.4. The Absence of Critical Learning

The other impact of focusing on human capital is that it marginalises those subjects that do not directly contribute to an economic gain like the social sciences and humanities. These sciences are therefore building blocks to critical thinking, ethical reflection and participatory democracy. Even the act of suppressing these topics undermines the role of education in developing highly educated citizens who can take the challenge of dealing with social and political issues. In a democratic society, where a plurality of opinions and discourse is valued, education is not sufficient, that education should only generate competent workers, but also individuals who are competent to think critically of what transpire around or between them. The education based solely on skill development, which in a vacuum of the emphasis on the development of critical agency would result in the production of technically proficient citizens, as well as non-participating political citizens. This contradicts the original vision of education as a means of inculcation of democratic values and social responsibility.

5.5. On the Problems of Equal Results

In terms of capabilities, the shortcomings of the human capital-based education in general are extremely cut-and-dried. Egalitarian educational opportunities will not necessarily result in egalitarian opportunities of disadvantaged populations. Social, cultural and institutional conditions which define the ability of a student to transform the opportunities into positive results are often overlooked in the analysis of policymakers. In India, education should be seen as not yet the freedom to effectively engage in political life but it has resulted in insecure employment, over-qualification or lack of civil participation by some students. Unless we actively strive to enhance potential, agency, voice and participation, education policy will only serve to consolidate as opposed to disrupting the disadvantage cycle.

5.6. Such a call for transformative change is now coming out

What comes to light in this analysis is that in the modern times policy mechanisms do incline towards prioritizing economic functionality of the state over social justice. In order to have education that is transformative in India, we must challenge this spirit of systemic inequalities and power imbalances. This means going beyond technocratic reforms to state what the social objectives of education are. One such avenue of this kind of change is a reorientation to capabilities, which is based on freedom, dignity, and agency. That way we will be able to make sure that education is not merely a process of economic amalgamation, of creating output in the labour market, but is also a launching column to equitable and democratic social transformation.

6. Methodology

This paper uses a critical policy approach to a conceptual research design based on qualitative researchers. The article will attempt no empirical generality and causal inference, but rather aim at the exposition of theories, normative re-evaluation and

ideological objection to the current education policy in India. Such an approach is appropriate to the examination of policy texts including the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which are not only technical documents but also normative and political texts that address specific visions of education, development, social organization. The interpretive reading of policy is the point of departure of the analysis that involves the already developed traditions in critical education policy research that dwell on discourse, underlying assumptions, and power relations. NEP 2020 is framed as the most critical policy text within the larger socio-economic and global framework. This research interrogates not the implementation results for its own sake, but their conceptual underpinnings and structural priorities incorporated within the policy framework.

Theoretical analyses are informed by the three complementarily nested models: Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and the Capability Approach. These frameworks are not used as distinct perspectives but complement one another as ways of looking at education policy and competing normative frameworks. Human Capital Theory offers ways to think about how the economic rationalities of policy design play out among them. Critical Pedagogy emphasises questions of power, agency and social justice, and the Capability Approach provides a holistic normative rubric to understand education in terms of freedom, agency and democratic participation.

The sources of data for this study are classic and modern educational theory, official policy documents, particularly NEP 2020, and peer-reviewed secondary education policy and philosophy of education literature. The analysis proceeds via thematic and concept synthesis, not through systematic coding in line with the purposes of conceptual inquiry. Central policies are analysed in light of their theoretical implications, enabling a critical analysis of the coherence of policy rhetoric and structural design. This methodological orientation focuses more on interpretation than coverage. Although it does not pretend to be a representative of the empirical evidence out there, its analytic generalisability is derived from participation in familiar theoretical frameworks and policy discussions. Such an approach is well-established in education policy scholarship and in research on normative and ideological aspects of reform. We acknowledge the limitations of this methodology. As such, this study did not analyse classroom practices, institutional implementation, or learner-level outcomes, nor did it take into account state-level variation in policy enactment. Nonetheless, these limitations are built into the design of the chosen research, and such limitations do not detract from any potential analytical objectives of the analysis. Rather, they hint at potential future research directions for the empirical examination that would be able to refine and test the conceptual development of this work.

7. Scope of the Study

This research forms a component of education policy and philosophy of education and is an extensive macro-level conceptualisation of competing paradigms behind current education reform in the Indian context. It concentrates primarily on exploring the ideological and structural tensions between Education as Human Capital and Education as Social Transformation, underpinned by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a focal policy reference. The analysis is intentionally policy-informed and theory-oriented. This study also interacts with policy texts, fundamental educational theories and normative tools to critically scrutinise the assumptions, values and priorities underlying educational policy design. By foregrounding conceptual clarity and critical reading, this study aims to help to identify how policy rhetoric and institutional mechanisms intersect, as part and parcel of the social purposes of education in India. This analysis is limited to the national policy level, and is not representative of an empirical look at classroom practices, institutional implementation or learner outcomes. Like this, the differences in policy implementation, governance frameworks, resources and pedagogical practices at the regional and state level fall outside the purview of this research. Such dimensions are known to be crucial, but the decision to omit them is also evidence of the study's approach of developing a rational macro-level analytical framework (rather than one that gives a holistic account of a data set). In this regard, by proposing a holistic theoretical framework within the capability approach, this paper hopes to contribute to the emerging debate on education, development and social justice. A conceptual framework is intended as an analytical tool for studies in the future for empirical, comparative and state-level studies, to extend and test its relevance in various educational contexts in India. By continuing to emphasise policy-level analysis and theoretical synthesis, this research firmly places itself as an important contribution to education policy scholarship. It therefore has a limited but generative scope, since it is not able to point to generalising empirically, yet presents a normative and conceptual understanding that is relevant for both policymakers of education policy and teacher educators and researchers with respect to the transforming role of education in unequal societies.

8. Contribution to Knowledge

This paper contributes to the existing literature in education policy by challenging the dominant economic orientation of current educational reform in India. Although recent literature on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India has primarily addressed descriptive analysis, implementation problems, or sector-specific reforms, this paper seeks to shed light on the normative and ideological underpinnings of the policy. In so doing, it broadens the analysis of NEP scholarship into a place where it's also about purpose, value, and social effects rather than merely what happens.

The main contribution of this study lies in the integration of the theoretical approach. Still, instead of contrasting or putting Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and the Capability Approach in opposition to each other, this work places the three in a systematic discussion that helps shed light on the conflicting tensions and hierarchies embedded in education policy. Such a synthesis yields nuances in our understanding of how economic rationalities coexist with, and often dominate, transformative educational aspirations at every turn when considering the design of policy. An additional contribution is the establishment of an original conceptual framework that maps the interaction of global economic pressures, national policy priorities, and educational outcomes for India.

Positioning the NEP 2020 as a mediating policy text influenced by market-oriented imperatives as well as transformative rhetoric, the framework maps out how education policy can promise inclusion yet reproduce inequality. This frame provides a

transferable perspective to analyse educational reforms in relation to other unequal and post-liberalisation spheres. This study further promotes the utilisation of the capability approach in education policy analysis in India. Although the capability framework has received extensive attention within development studies, its implementation as an evaluative and integrative prism used for the formulation and management of national education policy remains limited. Focusing on the coherence of education as an essential capability associated with agency, democratic participation, and social justice, the paper offers normative standards for evaluating coherence of policies that surpass employment and efficiency criteria.

Based on a methodological perspective, the paper confirms the legitimacy and utility of theoretical and normative inquiry in an empirical performance-based field. It shows that theory-driven investigation can expose layers of policy meaning and impact that are often not available to implementation- or data-driven explanations. Taken together, these contributions cast the paper as responding to ongoing debates on education, development, and transformation. Positioning the ethical as well as political implications of education as the core interest of the reform agenda, the study provides scholars, policymakers, and teacher educators with a framework for reframing how education reform can reflect and reconcile such economic concerns with democratic concern and social justice.

9. Implications for Teacher Education

The teachers should be educated to bridge the gap between education policy and what is happening in the classroom. These programs are where the policy ideas are not only conceptualised but incorporated and implemented as well in place of a simple forum to learn. The method of teacher training is highly important, regardless of whether the aim of education is the production of an effective workforce, or social change. This can be especially applicable to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes holistic growth of students and at the same time concentrates on employability and quantifiable success. The reason teacher education is important is because any high-minded targets we set in policy as the goals to reach some level of education in the technical aspect of our teaching becomes less applicable to the real classroom. In their turn, turning teachers into reflective and critical educators can help teachers engage with policy critically and in constructive ways that will not violate the moral and social aims of education. Viewed through that prism, we consider teacher education as not just professional training, but a project that has ethical implications and the political dimension to it.

9.1. Curriculum Orientation

The curricula of teacher education must be prepared in such a way that critical pedagogy, social justice and the capability approach is incorporated as part of the curriculum content. These theories enable future teachers to realize how systemic inequalities shape the manner in which students obtain education. Raising awareness is insufficient we must train the critical analysis on the curriculum, methods of teaching, institutional behaviour. Education of teachers can assist them to bring meaningful learning experiences by relating the knowledge about the subject to greater societal and ethical issues.

9.2. Assessment and Evaluation Practices

Currently, the assessment practice in teacher education has become outcome-focused, standardised, in line with school system. Although, of course, some valid grounds are behind the measurement of literacy and accountability, excessive attention to the quantitative outcomes may only weaken the more profound learning processes that transformative learning is supposed to bring about. In this regard, teacher education programs must include means through which assessments are more reflective and responsive, e.g., portfolios or classroom questions in conjunction with collaborative projects that may more easily, but also more egregiously, represent the growth of critical thinking and ethical reasoning and pedagogical judgment. These factors are not in the fold of standardised tests.

9.3. Continuing Professional Development and Reflexive Practice Theories

The educators ought to be engaged in professional development as a way of enhancing reflexivity and a research-oriented mindset. Teachers must be triggered in service of teaching and learning to get involved in educational research, reflect on their position, and reflect on what social consequences they could have about their own practices. This will involve replacing short-periodic training with talents to professional learning communities that educate on communication, experimentation, and critical inquiry. In these contexts, education may be organized so as to respond to the demands of policy and at the same time be educationally sound and socially accountable.

9.4. Community Engagement and Contextually Relevant Learning

Teacher learning must forge close relationships between schools, the local and the community government as well. Educators collaborate with society to get priceless knowledge of the socio-cultural realities that define the lives of students. By doing so, students would learn through collaboration with their educators at a local community level, meaningful and accessible learning, which is particularly applicable to students of marginalised groups. Therefore, community engagement must be one of the fundamental concerns of transformative teacher education, and not by-products.

9.5. Re-making Teachers as Agents of Change

Arguably, all these make teachers not just the enforcers of the policy but actual ethical actors who are capable of balancing economic interests in the pursuit of justice. Teacher education incorporating critical reflection, capability development and democratic values can ameliorate those biases about human capital evident in NEP 2020. Thus, teacher education can also provide a link between educational policy rhetoric through teacher education and create economically valuable and socially transformative learning experiences as opposed to ideology.

10. Conclusion

The tension between education as human capital and education as social transformation is so often represented as a binary decision between economic relevance and social justice. This paper has concluded that framing this way is not only analytically wrong but also normatively mistaken in the Indian context. Although a critical aspect of education policy is the economic functionality of education provision, it alone is insufficient to respond to the profound and intersecting inequalities that structure access, participation and outcomes in education in India. By engaging closely with the literature on NEP 2020, the paper has shown how education reform today is dominated by a substantial disparity between transformative rhetoric and economic operational logic. While the policy expresses promise of the values of holistic development, inclusion, and democratic values, those are limited by systems of governance, evaluation practices, and institutional needs that are structured for efficiency, employability, and measurable performance. In consequence, education seems likely to exist more as a device of social reproduction than as a lever for meaningful transformation.

The paper has offered an integrative conceptual basis to re-establish the objectives of an education policy by appealing to the Human Capital Theory, Critical Pedagogy and the Capability Approach. In fact, the capability view provides also a normative fulcrum of value incorporation amid economical utility and ethical and democratic concerns, where education is defined as an expansion of substantive freedoms, agency and participation. The reframing enables repositioning the evaluative frame of education policy towards a preoccupation with the limited, output measurements to a preoccupation with dignity, justice and social responsibility. The use of this analysis is not only limited to NEP 2020. Education policy must be evaluated not until it is assessed or believed to contribute to economic growth but it must be valued to add to growing human capacity and enhance democratic living in a society with structural inequality. Without this type of reorientation, transformative language will always be tokenism, and still will leave the roots of inequity. In the present paper, we suggest, as the final point, that education in India must be perceived as both economically applicable and socially transformative simultaneously, with neither of the two facets being secondary to the other. It takes deliberate normative clarity, institutional commitment, and pedagogical courage to come up with this balance. Only then will be in a position to provide the potential of education as the foundation on which inclusive development and democratic transformation in a more unequal society can be achieved.

11. References

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