EXAMINING THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GIRLS' HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 India and its effects on girls' higher education and women's employability. The policy will be implemented from the academic year of 2023-24. Secondary literature on these topics through a socio-political lens including precursors to the NEP, such as the Kothari Commission and the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968 and 1986, have been analysed. Interactions with relevant stakeholders and research on education and career policies in two varying groups of countries - those with the highest level of gender equality, namely the UK and Finland, and those with a similar socio-economic background to India, namely Mexico, and China have been included for a rounded view. This paper aims to trace the evolution of women's education and employability in India. The main focus of this paper lies in an analysis of the Gender Inclusion Fund as well as the National Career Counselling Portal that has been outlined in the NEP.

Collectively, this paper explores India's new 2020 policy and parallelly delves into the global context of education policies, using this context to provide recommendations to improve, optimise and implement the policy in the fields of education and employability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is an elaborate process involving the synergy between diverse interconnected subsystems and stakeholders[1]. The process of education, at its essence, can be distilled to the act of acquiring or imparting knowledge - the interaction between a teacher and a learner.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHCR) states that the right to education is a universal human right[2]. Education is a catalyst for development and an important instrument to reduce poverty and improve health, gender, equality, equity, peace, and stability. It drives innovation, strengthens societal institutions, and improves social cohesion[3]. An education policy can be defined as a systematic intervention that aims to improve the practice of education at all levels. It is exercised by all the potential stakeholders of education in the process of which resources are used to achieve predetermined goals or targets.

Policymakers have enacted a series of reforms in education in India, through education policies, plans of action, and curriculum frameworks. The Kothari Commission, NEP 1968, 1986, POA 1992, RTE 2009, and NCF 2005 have restructured the Indian education system to a great extent.

The NEP (New Education Policy) 2020 proposes a radical transformation of the existing education system in India. It focuses on the holistic development of students, universal access and equity, flexible and multidisciplinary education, technology integration and innovation, and research. It marks the third significant overhaul of India's education framework since gaining independence[4]. This paper will focus on analysing the National Education Policy 2020 from the lens of gender in higher education and employability.

1.1 Education Style from a Global Perspective

While this paper is based on the Indian education policy, it also sheds light on how countries of both similar socio-economic backgrounds and the highest level of gender inequality have addressed the gender gap in higher education and employability. Two distinct case studies have been examined to gain insights from developed countries and socio-economically analogous nations.

The first case focuses on The United Kingdom, renowned for it's progressive gender equality efforts in higher education. By closely examining their policies and initiatives, the paper identifies effective strategies that India could adopt. The similarities in governance structures between The United Kingdom and India provide a valuable framework for comparison.

The second case delves into China, a nation with a socio-economic context akin to India but experiencing higher gender inequality.the country also has similar cultural systems to India, making it an important comparison to draw. China's approach involves implementing laws and supportive policies to ensure equal access and retention of female students in schools, similar to India, but have seen a higher success rate.

Key focus areas encompass access and enrollment policies, financial support, combating gender bias, and promoting women's participation in STEM fields. By drawing lessons from these case studies, this research underscores the potential application of effective policies in India's quest for gender equality in higher education.

1.2 Counselling schemes and Employment[5]

Career counselling helps students identify potential future paths. It provides them with personalised career advice and helps them pursue the subjects that are best suited to their aptitude and interests[6].

The employability of women refers to their ability to secure and sustain employment as well as their potential to be recruited and retained in the workforce. An increase in the participation of women in the labour force will lead to economic growth, poverty reduction and the empowerment of women[7].

Gender stereotyping is a widely held belief or generalisation about the behaviours, characteristics, and roles performed by men and women. From an early age, young people absorb societal stereotypes about suitable jobs for men and women. Research shows more than half of young women feel their career options are limited by their gender. Careers guidance, free from gender bias, is one-way schools can start to tackle these views and overcome barriers resulting from unconscious

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bias[8]. Thus gender-sensitive career counselling can promote equality for women through increased participation in the labour force[9].

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Addressing Gender Inequality through the NEP

The primary objective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to ensure inclusive and high-quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. SDG-4 aims to provide universal access to free and complete education to all girls and boys by 2030[10]. According to UNESCO reports, India will be half a century late in achieving its universal education goals. This means the country will achieve universal primary education by 2050, universal lower secondary education in 2060, and universal upper secondary education in 2085[11].

In recent years, India has made significant progress in the field of education. However, these efforts have been inadequate to eradicate educational inequality and illiteracy. The World Economic Forum (WEF) recently released the annual Gender Gap Report for 2023, which measures gender disparity in various aspects of society. India has shown progress by moving up eight places to rank 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity. In 2017, 32% of girls were not enrolled in schools compared to 28% of boys. The dropout rate of girls in secondary school has decreased by approximately 5 percentage points, falling from 18.4% in 2017-18 to 13.7% in 2020-21[12]. For years, the education system has been plagued by a lack of and inadequate use of resources, too much emphasis on grades, a lack of rationalisation, and a lack of versatile and practical subjects[13]. In India, classrooms still exhibit traits of corporal punishment, teacher-centred rote learning, and discrimination[14]. Quality education is provided to a small minority of students based on their socio-economic status and not based on their aptitude and talents[15]. This results in a high dropout rate—leaving the youth vulnerable to child labour, abuse, and violence. It evicts them from the education system at a very young age[16].

To solve these problems and revolutionise the education system, the Central Government established the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020. This policy came into effect in the 2023-24 academic year. It will replace the 34 years of previous education policy. Through NEP 2020, all educational institutions will be mandated to conduct awareness programs on gender issues to break stereotyped gender roles, on the importance of harassment-free environments and equal treatment of genders, and legal protections and entitlements for girls and women including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO), the Maternity Benefit Act, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. This training will aim to raise teachers' and educational administrators' awareness of gender-sensitive and inclusive classroom management[17].

2.2 Consideration of Marginalised Groups

The NEP 2020 highlights the significance of education for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), comprising female and transgender students, individuals from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, minorities, people with disabilities, and those facing socio-economic hardships[18]. Historically, SEDGs have experienced underrepresentation in education, especially at the secondary and higher levels[19].

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https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

[18] Ministry of Education, National Education Policy 2020, P. 26,
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[19] Education for All in India, NEP 2020: Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) & Special Education Zones (SEZs),

Among SEDGs, women cut across all groups and face heightened exclusion and inequality. Recognizing this, the NEP 2020 prioritises the education of women[20]. Empowering women through education is expected to bring about positive societal changes, fostering a culture that values women's education throughout society and for future generations[21].

2.3 Concept of 'Gender Inclusion Fund'
The NEP calls for the establishment of a Gender Inclusion Fund. This fund will be available to all the states to carry out agendas that the central government deems important. The resources will be used to support and scale necessary community-based intervention programs to combat hurdles that prevent women from attending school. The aim of this fund is to ensure 100% enrollment of girls in schools[22].

Through initiatives encompassing the provision of conditional cash transfers, toilet and sanitation facilities, free boarding facilities, bicycles and so on the fund is expected to record a higher participation of women in education, particularly in higher education[23].

Furthermore, the Gender Inclusion Fund's aid will help increase access to educational resources for girls in rural areas and the SDGs. It will help ensure that the quality of existing resources is improved as well[24].

2.4 NEP's Special Emphasis on Career Counselling and Employability
In higher education, the new STEAM model (a system of education that integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) encourages experiential and application-based learning with research internships, enhancing students' employability. The policy also acknowledges the challenges faced by marginalised groups, including females and transgender individuals. To address this, schemes such as cycling groups and walking groups in schools will foster community participation and provide safety nets for vulnerable students.[25]

Efforts to promote gender equality in education involve identifying and addressing gender stereotypes, counselling programs for families, and increasing the representation of women in leadership positions within educational institutions. Furthermore, alternate pathways for female teacher recruitment will be introduced to reduce gender imbalances without compromising on merit and qualifications.

The NEP emphasises the need for early exposure to career guidance, starting as early as the middle school level. This allows students to explore various career options and develop a clearer understanding of their interests and aptitudes.[26] It also highlights the importance of mentorship programs—specifically honing on the interactions between students and experts in their fields of interest. These programs will facilitate career exploration, provide guidance, and help students understand the practical aspects of different careers.

The NEP 2020 promotes the concept of lifelong learning and recognizes that career decisions may change over time. Career counselling should support students in adapting to changing career landscapes and help them acquire the necessary skills for the future. The NEP also aims to increase the employment of female teachers in rural areas—ensuring that the contribution of women to the workforce increases[27].

There is more research needed to ascertain the benefits and disadvantages of the NEP 2020 on women's education and employability, and that is exactly what we want to explore and analyse in our paper.

3.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NEP 2020
The social status of women has been closely linked to their education status throughout history[28]. The social attitude towards women's education varied from positive support and acceptance to an attitude of indifference.

https://educationforallinindia.com/nep-2020-socio-economically-disadvantaged-groups-sedgs-special-education-zones-sezs/

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[22] Ministry of Education, National Education Policy 2020, P. 26, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

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Colonial Period: Under the colonial rule of the British, significant changes like industrialization, urbanisation, and social reform movements had a profound impact on women's status[29]. The colonial period brought about an increased awareness of the importance of women's education. However, despite efforts to promote it, obstacles such as early marriage, lack of female teachers, and conservative societal norms hindered progress.

To encourage girls' education, schools had to implement various measures like providing incentives in the form of free food, clothing, closed transport, and escorts for girls in purdah. Zenana teaching emerged as a way to educate dominant caste women who could not attend formal schools due to social and patriarchal practices, taking place within the confines of women's apartments. While the British promoted women's education for their own interests and to create employment opportunities for the British Raj, their initiatives laid the foundation for educational advancements in India[30].

Initially, missionaries played a crucial role in establishing schools for girls, primarily focusing on religious education and foundational literacy skills. Access to education was limited to women from elite families or the urban middle class. In the 19th century, socio-religious reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj played a pivotal role in advocating for women's empowerment through education[31].

Modern Period: After India gained independence in 1947, the government placed a strong emphasis on education as a means of national development. The establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC)[32] and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)[33] contributed to the expansion of higher education. Today, India has a diverse education system that includes both traditional and modern approaches. It encompasses schools, colleges, universities, technical and vocational institutes, and specialised research centres. Education is provided in multiple languages, with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as humanities, arts, and social sciences.

3.1 Precursors of the NEP-2020:

A thorough analysis of past precedents provides valuable insights to help avoid mistakes, promote policy continuity, enable adaptation to changing contexts, facilitate stakeholder engagement, ensure legal compliance, and support policy evaluation and accountability. It is an essential step in the policymaking process to inform evidence-based decision-making and increase the likelihood of successful policy outcomes.

Kothari Commission: The Kothari Commission was an ad hoc commission set up by the Government of India from 1964-66 to formulate policies for the development of education in India. The objective of this commission was to analyse the education sector in India[34]. It recognized the strong connection between education, national development, and prosperity. It was driven by the need for a revolution in the Indian education system, away from a system designed to serve an imperial administration to one that would be in tune with a modern, democratic, and socialist society through internal transformation, qualitative improvement, and expansion of educational facilities.

The Kothari Commission recognized the importance of women's education and recommended that the education of women should be undertaken as the most important program by both the Central and the State governments. Moreover, a special fund should be set up to promote women's education. The participation of women in education should be increased by providing scholarships and increasing the number of girls' schools and female staff in educational institutions[35].

National Policy on Education (NPE), 1968: Based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission the government of India adopted the National Policy of Education in 1968 under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Some of the salient features of this policy included free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years, well-qualified and educated teachers, following the three language formula including Hindi, English, and a regional language, focussing on education in the fields of science and research, agriculture and industry. This policy had a special focus on equalising educational opportunities with an emphasis on education among girls, backward classes, and tribal communities[36].

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968 placed significant emphasis on the significance of women's education in India. It acknowledged the long-standing underrepresentation of women in the education system and sought to address gender disparities while empowering women through education. The policy targeted various essential aspects of women's education, such as ensuring Universal Elementary Education for Girls, eliminating gender disparities, promoting Vocational Education for Women, encouraging STEM education for women, prioritising female teacher training, establishing girls' hostels for better access, focusing on education in rural areas, and incorporating a gender-sensitive curriculum. These efforts aimed to foster gender equality, enhance women's educational opportunities, and contribute to the overall progress and development of the nation[37].

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[37] Ministry of Education, National Policy on Education 1968 https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE-1968.pdf

However, the policy did not have much success due to a number of factors. One of these factors was the lack of a definite plan for the growth and betterment of the educational system. Furthermore, a lack of capital needed for the implementation of the policy hampered its effectiveness. Lastly, at the time, education was the state government's priority, not the central government's. This changed the prioritisation of education from state to state. [38]

The National Education Policy (NPE), 1986: The second education policy in India was promulgated in 1986 by the Government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It was later revised under the government of P. V. Narasimha Rao with the creation of the Programme of Action (POA), in 1992. It emphasises universal access and enrolment and universal retention of children up to 14 years of age[39].

The NPE highlights the importance of removing hurdles to gaining knowledge and equalising educational opportunities at all levels for women[40]. This policy presented the idea that women's education is equal. Thus educational institutions were encouraged to implement action programs to advance the position of women, promote national integration, and ensure the effective functioning of India's democracy. A primary goal was to increase the participation of women in sciences, vocational, technical, and commerce education. New institutional mechanisms would have to be implemented to ensure that gender sensitivity is reflected in the implementation of national programs. The POA highlighted the importance to restructure the education system to ensure equality in women's education in India.

Concrete steps undertaken include the implementation of a redesigned curriculum, the promotion of women's studies in various courses, and the active involvement of stakeholders involved including educational institutions, teachers, policymakers, and administrators.

However, none of the education policies have taken into account schools which are run throughout the country on commercial lines by certain persons or bodies. No education policy, so far , has suggested measures for reducing the gap in educational standards of poor and privileged children.[41]

3.2 Comparative analysis of the NEP-2020 and NPE-1986:

While the NEP 2020 and the NPE 1986 have similar targets, such as enhancing the educational attainment of girls and children from underprivileged backgrounds and developing higher-level educational institutions, the approaches and scope of the policies differ significantly. This reflects the changes in the goals of India.

Structure of the education system: The most prominent difference viewed is the structure of the education itself. The focus has shifted from a 10+2 format, which divided children 2 age groups of 6 to 16 and 16 to 18 years old, to a 5+3+3+4 format, which divided children into 4 age groups of 3 to 8, 8 to 11, 12 to 14 and 14 to 18 years old. This change highlights that the NEP 2020 implies that education starts from pre-school as compared to grade one as suggested by NPE 1986.

Practical and Experiential Learning: Furthermore, the NEP-2020 has a greater focus on an activity-based curriculum to enhance practical learning followed by a more detailed and in-depth study of the subjects chosen by students from grades 9-12, which aims to increase the critical understanding students possess of the content. All these concerns were not demonstrated in the NPE-1986, as they are a reflection of the needs of the 21st-century educational style.

Qualification requirements for teachers: Another notable change in NEP 2020 is the increased qualification requirement for teachers, emphasising the importance of well-qualified educators in the learning process. However, NPE-1986 focused more on teacher motivation and retention via seniors and a more holistic curriculum for a bachelor's in education.

Approach to vocational education: NEP 2020 places a stronger emphasis on developing skills through vocational subjects, recognizing the importance of practical application for students' growth.

Overall, NEP 2020 represents a broader perspective on education, acknowledging the essential role of individual growth and development beyond mere academic achievements. It seeks to create a more holistic learning environment that nurtures students' talents and potential. By contrast, NPE 1986 prioritised certain aspects of educational improvement while not fully embracing the transformative changes brought about by NEP 2020. The latter marks a shift towards a more comprehensive and student-centric education system, aiming to prepare students for a rapidly evolving world.

3.3 Policies Promoting Women's Education and employability in India:

Census 2011 reported that women make up 48.5% of the Indian population[42]. Despite this statistic, it is a sad reality that women don't receive the same academic and employment opportunities that their male counterparts do. Female entrepreneurs make up only 14% of the entrepreneurial population[43]. The International Labour Organization reported that

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[38] (*National Education Policies 1968 and 1986*, 2016) https://www.gktoday.in/national-education-policies-1968-and-1986/#:~:text=The%201968%20policy%20or%20NEP,India's%20economy%20was%20in%20tatters

[39] National Policy on Education 1986, Programme of Action 1992, P. 1-8, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/npe.pdf

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[41] (*CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NPE 2020*, n.d.) https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2010346.pdf

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women earned 48% less income than men[44].The Indian Government has recognized the need for women's contribution to the labour force and has introduced several schemes and initiatives to boost women's employability. Furthermore, there are Constitutional articles guaranteeing women's rights and their protection.

Article 16 states the right to equality of opportunities pertaining to employment. Article 39[d] declares the right to equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 42 asserts that state provisions must be in place for maternity benefits [45]

Digital India: Launched in 2015, the Digital India Scheme is the flagship program of the Government of India to use technology—including digital infrastructure, manufacturing, and governance—to form a technologically driven society and a knowledge economy[46]. The primary goal of this initiative is to empower the nation digitally and promote technological advancements through improved online infrastructure and internet connectivity.

Under this scheme, Information Technology can be leveraged to empower women by promoting participation, training, and education of women through improved accessibility to information[47]. This accessibility has allowed women to overcome barriers and seize educational opportunities, initiate businesses, and participate in the global economy. Additionally, digital platforms have given women a voice to share their stories and experiences, amplifying their presence in matters of policy and advocacy. The digital revolution has empowered women to actively engage in conversations surrounding gender equality and drive meaningful change rather than being mere bystanders[48].

Women Hostel Scheme: In recent years there has been a significant trend of women leaving their families to pursue their higher education and employment. The Women Hostel Scheme was designed with the aim of providing safe and affordable accommodations to women while they stay away from home in their pursuit of education and employment.[49]

By offering women a secure living environment, this scheme increases the access of women to higher learning and gainful employment. It encourages women to become active and productive participants of the labour force[50]. It will contribute to women empowerment and equity in society by breaking down any hurdles, particularly societal barriers, that may limit their progress.

National Policy for Empowerment of Women: This policy, formulated in 2001, focuses on women's education, health, economic empowerment, and social justice. The fundamental aim of this policy is to advance and empower women[51]. It is rooted in the principles of gender equality enshrined in the constitution of India. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women was adopted by the Government of India on March 20th, 2001 with the objective of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women[52].

Other secondary policies include *The Mahila Udyam Nidhi, the Crèche Scheme, the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)* and the *Mahila E-Haat*. The Mahila Udyam Nidhi helps supply loans for up to Rs. 5 lakhs to entrepreneurial women. The Crèche Scheme provides daycare facilities to working and ailing women's children. The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) helps women acquire skills and secure employment. The Mahila E-Haat is a programme that provides opportunities for women entrepreneurs. It helps them use technology to expand their businesses[53].

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[49]Women and Child Development Department, Working Women Hostel https://wcdhry.gov.in/schemes-for-women/working-women-hostel/

[50]Ministry of Child and Women Development, Scheme for working women Hostel, P. 2, https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Working%20Women%20Hostel_about_revised_about.pdf

[51] Ministry of Women and Child Development, National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/National%20Policy%20for%20Empowerment%20of%20Women%202001.pdf

[52] UN Women, National Policy on the Empowerment of Women https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/india/2001/national-policy-on-the-empowerment-of-women-2001

[53] "List of Women Empowerment Schemes in India: Eligibility & Complete Process." https://www.godigit.com/guides/government-schemes/women-empowerment

4.0 GENDER INCLUSION FUND:

The Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) was introduced in 2020, to constitute the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students[54]. The revamped Samagra Shiksha Scheme[55] operates under the purview of the Ministry of Education but is given to states to implement based on the priorities determined by the central government to assist female and transgender children in gaining access to education. The NEP focuses the fund on provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, etc, to aim for 100% enrollment of girls in schooling. It further aims to enhance access, participation, and retention of girls and transgender children in higher education through community-based interventions. For the year 2021-2022, the total budget dedicated to the GIF stands at over 10877 Crore Rupees[56]. NEP 2020 uses the GIF to bring education spending up to 6% of gross domestic product[57]. The fund includes provisions for free textbooks and uniforms for girls and children below the poverty line up to the 8th grade as well as hostels, transport facilities, aids and appliances for children with special needs, self-defence training, a separate provision of stipend for CWSN girls @ Rs. 200 per month for 10 months, and sanitary pad vending machines.

The primary sources of funding for the fund include government budgetary allocations, international aid from development partners, and contributions from private entities committed to gender inclusivity. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of gender inclusion in education and employment, the GIF actively engages in collaborative efforts with stakeholders on many levels. The fund's success hinges on partnerships with various government bodies and also encourages a public-private partnership model to foster innovation and sustain long-term impact. The NEP further emphasises partnerships with NGOs and women's organisations which leads to a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by girls in accessing higher education[58]. Specifically, the organisations can offer insights that inform the fund's initiatives, to ensure that the target demographic, young girls and transgender students, are aided by the fund.

The fund, if successfully implemented, overall, will ensure more girls receive higher education and are ready for employability. A prominent issue that can be seen from the fund breakup is the limitation of free textbooks and uniforms to only girls in the 8th grade and the end of stipends in the 10th grade. This leads to a disregard for the education of girls in higher classes which further discourages women from pursuing higher education as they will have to bear the costs of their education. While the fund specifically aims to improve the leadership capacity of girls through positive civil dialogue[59], no specific measures in the budget breakdown have been made to create skill development programs, rather outside the GIF the NEP emphasises more female leaders in the school environment itself. Another critique is the significant gap between the high-quality education provided to a minority of students and the varying quality of education received by the majority from institutions, including public schools and those operated by the government and local bodies. Quality education is provided to a fraction of students based on their socio-economic privilege and not on the basis of their aptitude and talent[60].

Evaluation is an important phase of the policy cycle. Effective measurement of the gender inclusion funds impact will enhance transparency and accountability and help gauge progress towards policy objectives and determine the policy's effectiveness. However, The NEP 2020 does not mention any mechanisms for the measurement and evaluation of the Gender Inclusion Fund[61].

4.1 Measurement and Assessment

While discussing the effectiveness of the gender inclusion fund, measurement factors must be considered: Budget allocation program implementation, reach, participation, gender disparities, attitudinal changes, and long-term outcomes. As the fund has been recently integrated, its effectiveness cannot yet be measured. However, a similar program run previously called the national public bicycle scheme focused on providing free bike transportation to girl students, can be examined to estimate how effective the GIF will be. This initiative is typically geared towards female learners who have entered high school and live in rural areas at some distance from their schools[62]. The national public bicycle scheme has

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[54] NEP 2020, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
[55] PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, Implementation of NEP,
https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/update/RU3055.pdf
[56] Ministry of Education, Steps taken by the Government for Gender Inclusion Fund,
https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1776914
[57] Ankita Gupta, National Education Policy and Gender Inclusion,
https://ijaem.net/issue_dcp/National%20Education%20Policy%20and%20Gender%20Inclusion.pdf
[58] Dr. Aatish Parashar, https://csrbox.org/India_CSR_news_States,-civil-society-organizations-must-work-together,-to-ensure-NEP-to-be-effective_1421
[59] Ankita Gupta, National Education Policy and Gender Inclusion,
https://ijaem.net/issue_dcp/National%20Education%20Policy%20and%20Gender%20Inclusion.pdf
[60] Nitya Rao, Quality with Quantity, P. 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/8f008ba0-cf10-30e0-acfb-373ef85fba41?read-now=1&seq=1
[61] Ministry of Education, Government of India, P. 27,
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
[62] National Portal of the Government of India, National Public Bicycle Scheme https://www.india.gov.in/national-public-bicycle-scheme

been implemented in numerous states including Rajasthan[63], Karnataka[64], Chhattisgarh (Saraswati Bicycle Scheme)[65] and West Bengal (Sabooj Sathi)[66]. This scheme has allowed women to continue their schooling by providing them with a safe and affordable means of transportation. It has also increased participation of women in higher education and enrolment in schools. Keeping the success of this initiative in mind, the distribution of bicycles to SEDGs, including women, has been listed as a concrete step to be taken under the Gender Inclusion Fund[67]. This step will likely empower women, improve their socioeconomic status and increase access to education.

4.2 Global Schemes similar to Gender Inclusion Fund

Similar schemes in countries abroad can be examined to see what aspects worked best, to help with the mode of integration. Similar to the Gender inclusion fund in India, the UK has also employed a combination of policy measures to mitigate the gender differential in educational enrollment and attainment. The effectiveness of the policies alongside societal changes has contributed to staggering changes in attainment levels right from the primary section up to higher education.

Girls' attainment levels in higher education in the UK pivoted during the 1980s when they significantly received higher grades as compared to their male classmates. This difference amounted to about 5 grade points, a sharp positive turn from underperforming by at least 5% in the 1960s[68]. This difference is still in favour of girls: in 2022, 76.7% of girls achieved passes of a C above at the GCSE level (the Indian equivalent are the grade-10 board examinations), compared to 69.8% of boy[69]. In the context of further education, the attainment levels at A levels (Indian equivalent are the grade-12 board examinations) are fairly similar, with girls having a menial advantage of about 5 percent. In fact, the qualification levels of both men and women under the age of 25 are very similar[9].

This change in achievement and enrollment levels contributed to a combination of policies adopted by the government in order to provide an equitable field for girls.

The post-war Labour governments promoted traditional family values and established a welfare state, demanding more female labour. This spurred higher educational expectations for women, empowering the women's movement and driving progress towards gender equality in education. Economic motives further pushed government policies on education, encouraging skilled labour and scientific professions. Initiatives like the 1944 Education Act improved the 16-19 education system, offering vocationally-focused school courses for better opportunities for all genders[70]. Additionally, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 banned bias against women in education and employment. Consequently, women's acceptance in higher education rose, leading to increased enrollment and more women in leadership roles within the educational sector[71].

Similar to the National education policy 2020 of India, which focuses on improving teacher qualifications and representation at the management levels of schools, the UK also experienced a similar movement termed 'educational feminism', where teachers were instrumental in spreading gender awareness and promoting an 'anti-sexist' ideology in the school. They also engaged in specialised projects to create funds and provisions for research grants for women in higher education[11].

Like the Gender Inclusion Fund in India, the UK has addressed the levels of sexual harassment faced by women in education, specifically higher education. They have used a comprehensive approach, combining policies such as The Equality Act 2010, which played an instrumental role in acknowledging the harassment levels and providing resources to overcome it, and the civic duty of institutions such as universities to provide helplines and code of conduct guidelines for both teachers and students[72]. As a developed nation and country with a similar educational structure as India based in colonial times, the UK can be seen as a model for effective policies that have improved the position of women in higher education.

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[63] CNBC TV 18, Rajasthan govt to spend Rs 133 cr on bicycles for girl students ahead of state polls
https://www.cnbctv18.com/politics/rajasthan-govt-to-spend-rs-133-cr-on-bicycles-for-girl-students-ahead-of-state-polls-16451571.htm
[64] Department of school education, Government of Karnataka, Free Bicycle Distribution Scheme
https://www.schooleducation.kar.nic.in/pryedn/bicycles.html
[65] My Scheme, Saraswati Bicycle Scheme, https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/scy
[66] The Wire, Free Bicycles Help Wheel Students to School But What About Freedom of 'Action' and 'Thought'?
https://thewire.in/education/free-bicycles-help-wheel-students-to-school-but-what-about-freedom-of-action-and-thought
[67] Ministry of Education, Government of India, P. 27,
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
[68] Arnot, & Phipps. (2003). Gender and education in the United Kingdom. In *UNESCO*. Retrieved July 28, 2023, from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000146735.locale=en
[69] Joint Council for Qualifications."Proportion of Gcse Entries Awarded a C/4 or Higher in The United Kingdom between 2000 and 2022, by Gender." Statista, Statista Inc., 25 Aug 2022
,https://www.statista.com/statistics/282484/gcse-pass-rate-in-uk-by-gender/
[70] Gupta, Sanjiv & Arnot, Madeleine & David, Miriam & Weiner, Gaby. (2001). Closing the Gender Gap: Postwar Education and Social Change. Contemporary Sociology. 30. 466. 10.2307/3089321.
[71] *A History of Women's Education in the UK*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 28, 2023, from https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/history-womens-education-uk/
[72] Lewis. (2022). *Sexual harassment and violence in further and higher education*. House of Commons Library. Retrieved July 28, 2023, from https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9438/

In India, an estimated 23 million girls drop out of school each year because there aren't enough facilities for menstrual hygiene. However, we hope to eradicate this problem by implementing as well as taking help from a similar socio-economic country, China. In the coming five years, China will help other developing countries including India build 100 health projects for women and children, send certain teams of medical professionals to provide services and implement 100 happy campus projects to finance the schooling of poor girls and raise girls' school enrolment rates. It will also host 30,000 women from developing countries to take part in training programmes in China and provide 100,000 skills training opportunities in local communities of other developing countries, hence opening other employability options[73].

In addition to the preceding characteristics, two specific elements also influence China's approach to educational aid.

Linking education and culture: China's domestic governing system is structured, in part, by grouping similar functional areas under a common 'system' (xitong). Education and culture are part of the same system, which means that they often have common policy initiatives and priorities. In a country such as India where prioritising culture is also of the utmost importance, such a framework would help immensely if implemented in rural areas.

The process contributes to the close integration between China's education aid and cultural promotion, particularly via the Chinese language. It also explains why a single counsellor office in Chinese embassies has a responsibility for both education and culture but not responsibility for China's professional and vocational training programs, which are under the Ministry of Commerce (as discussed below).

Learning from China's experience: Indian experts and officials believe that China's developmental experience provides valuable lessons—both positive and negative—for other developing countries. As one expert explained in a 2011 interview, 'Chinese aid is based on China's own experience. For instance, Chinese aid focuses on agriculture—which was very important for China's own developmental process. China is not really promoting its own approach, but naturally, Chinese experts and officials prioritise programs and issues which they think will be useful for developing countries. It is much easier to draw a parallel with India considering the fact that we too are an agrarian economy with a humongous population and similar social construct. 'This perspective helps explain the value placed on exposure to China through vocational training and university scholarships[74].

5.0 CAREER COUNSELLING AND EMPLOYABILITY:

Career counselling helps students understand what career options they have and how to pursue them. Women have made an impact through their innovative work and career choices across all fields and it is important to motivate young girls to strive for more and career counselling makes that possible. [75]

The NEP offers specific recommendations for the effective implementation of career counselling in schools. For example, it recommends providing a variety of opportunities for students to explore their interests and talents through career fairs, work placements and internships. It also emphasises the development of key skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication to enable students to make informed career decisions. [76] It stresses on the importance of providing students with comprehensive information about the various occupations, including required skills, qualifications, salary prospects and work environment.

A number of factors must be considered in aligning career guidance strategies with the NEP. Schools must evaluate the existing career guidance services and identify the additional resources needed for an effective system. They should also foster a culture that recognizes the importance of career guidance as an integral part of the curriculum.

An effective school career counselling system must be comprehensive and integrated with the overall goals of the educational institution. The key elements of such a system are a clear vision and mission of career guidance, a well-trained team of experienced professionals, a wide range of career guidance activities and resources, and a strong partnership between the school and the community.

Supporting students from diverse backgrounds, including those from marginalised communities, is essential to ensure inclusive careers guidance. This can be achieved by providing culturally sensitive career guidance materials, partnering with local organisations to provide support, and training teachers to be sensitive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Technology can play a valuable role in career guidance through access to information, guidance and progress tracking. Online career counselling tools, virtual career fairs, networking events, and career counselling software are some of the ways technology can enhance the career counselling experience. National education policies recognize gender stereotypes that prevent girls from accessing education and lead to high dropout rates. Anganwadi workers, teachers and local social entrepreneurs are trained to provide appropriate counselling to families with girls.

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[73] http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xivisitus/2015-09/28/content_21995521_2.htm
[74] https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/china-funds-trust-phase-iii-cfit-iii-higher-education
[75] .Importance of psychological counselling in educational institutions ~ Group Discussion Ideas.
[76] (*Implementing the Recommendations of NEP 2020: A Comprehensive Analysis of Career Guidance in Indian Schools*, 2023)

In practice the NEP has proposed to increase the number of women in educational institution management positions, including principals, teachers, janitors, physical instructors and other staff positions, which will help reduce the gender gap in both employment and career opportunities. NEP 2020 aims to address gender inequality in teacher recruitment. In order to reduce the gender inequality between teachers (especially in some rural areas), alternative methods of recruiting female teachers are introduced without compromising on both educational and professional qualifications.[77]

Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) are now extended to teachers at all new school levels (primary, preparatory, secondary and post-secondary education). The results of TET and NTA tests of the respective subjects are also considered while recruiting subject teachers. The purpose of NEP 2020 is to recruit teachers for the school complex and share the shortage of teachers, especially for music, dance, art, vocational teachers and supervisors, coaches, vocational teachers, classical language teachers, social workers, technical and maintenance workers. them everywhere in the school group.

The NEP 2020 encourages school institutions to employ "local dignitaries" or experts as "master teachers" in various subjects such as traditional local arts, handicrafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture, etc., as well as vocational and skill subjects.

NEP's new model, called STEAM, is an update of the current student STEM model because it focuses on experiential, applied learning and research-based practice. To improve employability, students have internships in local industry, business and community as well as research internships as part of a comprehensive, comprehensive education.

All educational institutions are required to implement gender awareness programs to break stereotypical gender roles, the importance of a harassment-free environment and gender equality, and legal protection and rights of girls and women, including the Child Marriage Act. , Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO), Maternity Benefit Act and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. The aim of this training is to raise the awareness of teachers and educational leaders about gender-sensitive and inclusive classroom management. [78]
The NEP 2020 program is expected to introduce changes to close the gender gap in male and female literacy. To achieve this goal, awareness among teachers, parents and the community must be created. Change will only happen when society becomes aware of the evils caused by preventing girls from getting an education. [79]

Finland has been known as a pioneer in the field of gender equality and education around the world, making it an important case to analyse in the context of comparing the effectiveness of the NEP-2020 policies.

Since the 1970s, career education and counselling have been a key facet of the Finnish education system- requiring students from ages 13-16 to dedicate 76 hours towards career-based counselling sessions. It has long been considered a core subject on equal lines as traditionally recognised classes such as maths and sciences. It aims to ensure that the level of enrollment rates of students going to university stay high and avoid students from dropping out of school[80]. It also focuses on translating the needs of the dynamic and ever-changing labour markets into the education system by urging students to enter the demanded fields[81]. The result has been greater holistic development of all students and increased perceived career-based competence, which leads to a more empowered workforce. According to data provided by the world bank, Finland experienced an increasing female-to-male ratio for its labour force participation rate since 1990[82], correlating as a consequence of implementing career counselling as a part of the schooling system.

The following example highlights how career counselling can positively impact women, showcasing the importance of career counselling in the NEP-2020 and the need for it to be effectively implemented.

5.1 Successful Indian Pilot Programmes:
Last year, Edumilestones conducted a career awareness workshop for 100 schools, where teachers played a crucial role in leading the online session during the pandemic. Building on this success, the Finance Minister of Bikaner has outlined a plan to extend knowledge in 1000 government and private schools in collaboration with Edumistones.[83]

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[77] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/edutrends-india/nep-2020-empowering-the-teacher/

[78] (*Press Information Bureau*, 2021)

[79] (*NEP- 2020 for Progressive Growth of Women Education in India - Sentinelassam*, 2022)

[80] Finland: Access to Guidance Counsellors and One-Stop Guidance Centres
https://www.oecd.org/education/career-readiness/examples-of-practice/collapsecontents/Example%20of%20Practice%20-%20Finland,%20Guidance%20One%20Stop%20Centres.pdf

[81] Kettunen, J., Lee, J., & Vuorinen, R. (2020). Exploring Finnish Guidance Counsellors' Conceptions of Career Management Skills. SAGE Open, 10(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020968778

[82] World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Estimates are based on data obtained from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT at ilostat.ilo.org/data

[83] (*India's Largest Career Counselling Project Paramarsh Launched In Bikaner*, 2022)
https://www.hindustantimes.com/brand-post/indias-largest-career-counselling-project-paramarsh-launched-in-bikaner-101644583530275.html

In another significant initiative, Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal launched a career counselling program for students and teachers in Bikaner, Rajasthan, on January 26, 2022. He emphasised the government's commitment to nurturing the potential of the youth and their role in nation-building.[84]

Additionally, Verizon India's IT and Technology Center, in partnership with Nirmaan Organization, introduced a Mobile Career Counseling Lab (MCL) equipped with digital infrastructure. This MCL provides comprehensive counselling support to rural students, offering psychometric tests, technological tools, and mobile applications to help them explore opportunities for a better future.

The "Career Counseling on Wheels" initiative will cover around 10,000 students and youth in four remote districts of Karnataka during its first pilot year. It aims to bridge the digital divide in rural communities and empower the youth for a brighter future. Verizon India's CEO, Vijayaraman Subramanian, highlighted the project's significance in advancing technology for positive change and creating opportunities for all. The MCL initiative is set to expand further, benefiting other southern states and eventually reaching all parts of the country.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:
Female role models
Feminisation of teaching gives girls an inherent advantage over boys in education. This was viewed as one of the factors contributing to increased educational attainment levels amongst young girls in the UK[85]. Similarly, in the Indian context, by providing more female role models in higher education would not only inspire girls but normalise their choice of choosing to educate themselves. This would help increase the enrollment levels. Results from a study conducted revealed that female role models play a significant role in motivating young girls perform better in school[86]. This further justifies the importance of exposing young girls, especially in rural areas, with the possibilities of what they can achieve and reduce their limitation of career choice based on their restricted schemata about career choices.

Structured and Monitored Leadership Programs
Another key program which should be implemented via policies are the leadership programs. These would entail introducing leadership discourse and encouraging girl students to take on positions of leadership. While the NEP mentions working towards more female teachers and principals, the implementation of a structured and monitored leadership program would further encourage girl students. These would primarily help with confidence building, specifically for girls who grow up facing societal and cultural barriers. Through mentoring, leadership programs, and skill-building activities those who have been systemically put down would be able to develop their self esteem and assertiveness. Moreover, these sessions would act as a means for fostering ambition and creating supportive networks, integral aspects of development for the workplace.

Focus on implementation and Monitoring
Surveys conducting in China, in 2021, show that 99.9 percent of school-age girls are receiving formal education in China[87]. Moreover, 44.34% of senior-high school students are girls. Girls also make up more than 50% of the students in universities offering bachelor's degrees as well as postgraduate studies. However, this was not always the case. Till the mid-1950's 90% of girls above the age of 15 were illiterate. To combat these issues, the central government has implemented a mandatory nine-year compulsory education law, as well as regulations to ensure girls cannot drop out of school. Moreover, special supportive policies as well as strict monitoring were put into place to help underprivileged girls. The Chinese government focused on consistent monitoring to ensure all policies and funds were properly allocated and implemented. The government also prioritised working with nonprofits and social institutions to promote female education.

7.0 CONCLUSION
A thorough analysis of the NEP will highlight potential areas of potential concern. The implementation of NEP 2020 has the potential of being a setback for women's education. When viewed through a critical lens, the policy is based on exclusion. The focus of the NEP on digitization does not account for the lack of suitable inexpensive technological implements for SEDGs. It has also been proposed that schools without a certain minimum number of students will be shut down, reducing accessibility to education. It can also lead to an over-dependence on distance learning programs like Open Schools. This will reinforce the ideas of domesticity for women and reduce their mobility and participation in the labour force[88].

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[84] (*Verizon India and Nirmaan Organization Launch a First-Of-Its-Kind Mobile Career Counselling Lab- CSRBOX*, 2021)

[85] Skelton, Christine. (2012). Men teachers and the "feminised" primary school: A review of the literature. Educational Review, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131911.2011.616634

[86]Beaman L, Duflo E, Pande R, Topalova P. Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: a policy experiment in India. Science. 2012, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3394179/

[87] Kang Bing, China Daily, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202012/29/WS5fea6dafa31024ad0ba9f1dc.html

[88] Neha Bhatt on behalf of Devex, Examining India's new education policy through a gender lens
https://www.devex.com/news/examining-india-s-new-education-policy-through-a-gender-lens-98007

In conclusion, this paper delves into the crucial aspects of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with a specific focus on girls' higher education and employability. The NEP demonstrates a significant commitment to promoting gender inclusivity and career counselling, recognizing their importance in shaping the future of education and the workforce.

Regarding the gender inclusion fund, the paper highlights the necessity of focusing on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure optimal utilisation and long-term impact. Collaboration with diverse stakeholders offers the potential to strengthen the fund's impact, reducing leakages, corruption, and guiding future policy decisions for sustained positive outcomes.

Furthermore, the NEP's emphasis on career counselling is commendable, providing students with various opportunities like career fairs, internships, and job shadowing to explore their interests. Equipping students with essential skills and knowledge about different careers fosters informed decision-making and enhances their employability prospects.

Drawing inspiration from developed countries like the United Kingdom and Finland, the paper explores strategies employed to bridge the gender gap in higher education. Additionally, case studies of Mexico and China provide valuable insights applicable to socio-economically similar countries like India. By studying these approaches, India can potentially adopt effective policies to promote gender equality in education.

Overall, the NEP 2020 review undertaken in this paper highlights the significance of gender-inclusive education policies and career counselling in shaping a more equitable and prosperous future for girls in higher education and the workforce. By drawing upon global best practices and contextualising them to India's unique challenges, the NEP has the potential to drive positive change and foster social impact for generations to come.

Ø **ADVOCACY MATERIAL:**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/12RhKtUQPLyJIk4xR951nLvB2UZ83maY8Vp-L5s14a5Q/edit?usp=sharing