



A study on India's demographic profile and NEP-2020

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Abstract

India, one of the fastest growing Asian economy, with its 1.35 billion population, is also one of the youngest nations in world. Almost two-thirds of its population is in the working age bracket of 15-59 years, which clearly shows that India has demographic dividend, which started long back in 2005-06 and would continue till 2055-56. Now this demographic dividend has created immense growth potential for India, but with its own share of challenges. One of the biggest challenges posed by this enormous size of young population, is to provide them with gainful employment. If we analyse the performance of the current government or the previous ones, they all have poorly performed on this front. There are many reasons held responsible for it, amongst which, the striking one has been our education system. We see every year hundreds and thousands of students are churned out from universities and colleges with professional degrees, but still their employment rate is very poor. These professional graduates, though eligible as per qualification, mostly are not employable as they are not industry ready. So, the question arises - Are we wasting our demographic dividend? What's the solution to it? The answer comes in the shape of much awaited overhauling in our education system. Yes, my reference is to our New Education Policy - 2020, which is expected to bring a revolutionary change over a time period in terms of its socio-economic impact. In this research work, using the secondary sources of information, such as related published research, reports of international and national agencies, etc, an effort has been made to highlight the advantages this demographic dividend brings to India, along with its set of challenges and critically analyse, how our New Education Policy will help India in realising true potential of this much talked about demographic dividend, before it gets too late.

Keywords: demographic dividend, new education policy (NEP), employability

Introduction

India, second largest democracy, starts its journey of 37-year period of demographic dividend. From 2018, working-age section of Indian population (i.e., people between age of 15 years and 64 years) has become bigger than the dependant age population (i.e. children aged 14 years or below and people above 65 years of age). This demographic bulge in population is expected to stay till the year 2055, i.e. 37 years from its start.

Methodology

The present research paper attempts to review the state of demographic profile that India has, associated issues in the field of education and employment. In this regard, it critically analyses the National Education Policy 2020. It also draws reference from previous studies on demographic dividend and education.

Demographic Dividend

Demographic Dividend Explained

"United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) defines demographic dividend as the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working age population (15-64) is larger than the non-working age share of the population (14 and younger, 65 and older)".

Demographic dividend refers to a period-usually 20-30 years-when fertility rates fall due to significant reductions in child and infant mortality rates.

This fall is often accompanied by an extension in average life expectancy that increases the portion of the population

that is in the working age group.

The demographic dividend is defined as a *rise in the rate of economic growth* due to a rising share of working age people in a population.

Demographic Dividend as a Mechanisms for Growth

During this phase of the demographic bulge, the desired economic benefits are delivered through a four-factor mechanism:

1. Labour Supply: But its benefit is dependent upon the ability of the economy to productively employ the extra work force.
2. Increase in savings: As the count of dependent people decreases, individuals/households can save more. This results in increased national savings rates that further increases the stock of capital in developing countries like India which are already characterized by shortages of capital. Investment of this accumulated capital results in higher productivity.
3. Human Capital: Decrease in fertility rates results in much healthy women and lesser economic pressures at home. This enables parents to invest more resources per child, which leads to better health and educational outcomes.
4. Increase in Demand: the increase in domestic demand which is brought about by the increase in GDP per capita and the decreasing dependency ratio.

Many countries like Japan, Singapore, China, South Korea have utilised this 'demographic dividend' to their advantage, enhancing their rate of economic growth.

Infact Japan was the first amongst the major economies to enjoy fast growth because of this positive change in it's population structure. Its demographic-dividend period lasted from 1964 to 2004, during which it was seen that Japan grew at an incredible rate during the first ten years, out of which in five years at a double-digit growth rate. China also saw similar accelerated economic growth in this period of demographic dividend stage, which it entered in 1994(which was 16 years after it's economic reforms started in 1978). Post reforms and due to this demographic profile China enjoyed 16 years of high economic growth, out of which for eight years it enjoyed a double-digit growth. Singapore also experienced the demographic dividend phase that began in 1979. During this phase, it enjoyed a double-digit growth rate for four years out of ten years. But it is worth mentioning here that this demographic change alone cannot increase economic growth as there are several other factors. The UN agency has clearly stated that countries can leverage the economic potential of this population bulge only if a country is able to provide good health, quality education and decent employment to its population.

India's Demographic Dividend

India, one of the fastest growing Asian economy, with its 1.35 billion population. One of the youngest country in the world, having almost two-thirds of its population is in the working age bracket of 15-59 years. Demographic dividend, which started long back in 2005-06 and would continue till 2055-56.

Other Important related Issues:

State of Employment– Current Un-employment rate in India is 6.9%.

Education Budget– India spent only 3.1% of its GDP on education.

India's International Rank- India has been ranked at the 116th position in the most recent edition of the World Bank's annual Human Capital Index

If India wants to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, it will need to completely refocus its education policies.

India's demographic bulge can translate into a demographic dividend if this human resource transforms into productive quality workforce through interventions in the fields of healthcare, education, skill training and creation of sustainable employment opportunities, failing which the supposed demographic advantage could turn into a demographic disaster.

Hurdles in the way

India's challenge is to create conditions for faster growth of productive jobs outside of agriculture, especially in the organized manufacturing and services as well, even while improving productivity in agriculture.

Whether India can reap this demographic dividend to the nation's advantage or let it become a curse depends on two factors-

Drastic quality improvement in this new workforce by much better education, health and skill development and Creating better livelihood opportunities.

Reference to a document which is on the framework to implement the National Mission for Skill Development (2015), "India currently faces a severe shortage of well trained, skilled workers. Large sections of the educated

workforce have little or no job skills, making them largely unemployable. Therefore, India must focus on scaling up skill training efforts to meet the demands of employers and drive economic growth."

In India, the overall picture shows a lack of highly trained, better quality labour and required job skills, contributing to sub optimal realisation of demographic dividend.

Government's Initiatives

To capitalize on the demographic bulge, the Government has undertaken a number of policies, initiatives, and programs. Efforts are being made to equip youth with skills required by today's industries and address the demand & supply gaps.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

National Skill Development Agency

National Skill Certification and Money Reward Scheme, etc.

But still it's not enough and much needs to be done if India wants to realize true economic potential of its demographic profile.

Way forward

Some suggested areas that need immediate government focus to give them the needed push so that India could optimise the benefits from its current demographic profile are:

Improving Human Capital

Skilling

Health & Education

Creating Jobs

Promoting the growth of Labour-Intensive sectors

Innovation & Infrastructure

Providing necessary policy support

New Education Policy-2020

National Educational Policy (NEP)-2020 – A Long-term Solution

The new education policy is the third national policy on education. The first policy was brought in 1968 by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government, the second one was by the government of Mr.Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, which was later taken by the P.V. Narshima Rao government in 1992. Now after more than three decades, precisely 34 years, we have a new education policy that aims and promises to bring about a revolutionary change in India's education system. This new Educational Policy, or NEP, is both is hailed as both, visionary and ambitious.

Its first draft was prepared and submitted by a panel chaired by former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan and submitted to the government in 2018. The government then put forward the draft for public feedback in 2019.Finally, it got the approval of the union cabinet and was passed in parliament.NEP 2020 covers a wide range of issues ranging from school education to higher education.

School Education – Some of the Important Aspects

Universal Access to Education for all

NEP 2020 places lot of emphasis on providing universal access to education at all school levels- preschool to secondary. For this the new policy aims to provide Infrastructure support, innovative education centres to induct back dropouts in the mainstream system, tracking students and their learning levels, creating way for multiple

pathways to learning, both formal and informal education modes, associating counselors/well-trained social workers with schools, introducing open learning for classes third, fifth and eighth grade through NIOS/State Open Schools, secondary education programs equivalent to 10th and 12th grade, vocational courses, adult education/literacy and life-enrichment programs are some of the proposed ways for achieving this. It aims to bring back around 2 crores out of school children back into main stream.

Early Childhood Care & Education

NEP places lot of emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education, for this the traditional 10+2 structure of school curriculum is proposed to be replaced by a new 5+3+3+4 curricular structure which corresponds to ages 3-8years, 8-11years, 11-14years, and 14-18 years respectively. By this it will bring the uncovered age group of 3-6 years under school curriculum, which has been globally recognized as the crucial phase for development of child's mental faculties. This new school curricular system will have 12 years of schooling, where three years will be of Anganwadi/pre schooling. For this NCERT will create a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age of 8years.

Achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

NEP recognizes the importance of achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy for effective learning, therefore it proposes to establish National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by MHRD. States will be required to prepare their implementation plan for attaining this in all primary schools by 2025 for learners up to grade three.

Changes in Curriculum and Pedagogy of Schools

This national policy also proposes to transform the school curricular as well as teaching pedagogy so as to aim for overall student's development by providing them 21st century key skills, reducing their curricular content to improve their essential learning and critical thinking with increased attention on experiential learning. Now students will have more flexible system of choice of subjects and there will no hard division between arts and science subject or between curricular activities and extra-curricular activities, or between vocational and academic streams.

Vocational education is proposed to be starting from 6th grade in schools and will provide for internships. A new broad National Curricular Framework for School Education, NCFSE 2020-21, will be developed by the NCERT.

Multilingualism

The new policy has placed importance on mother tongue/local language/regional language as the medium of instruction at least up till standard 5, and preferably up till standard 8 and beyond. Sanskrit has to be offered at all levels, whether school or higher education, as an option to students, promoting the three-language model. Several other classical Indian languages and literatures should also be available to students as options. The point is no one language should be imposed on any student.

Reforms in Assessment System

NEP 2020 also proposes to bring a change in our academic

assessment system, shifting from summative assessment style to a regular and more formative assessment system, which will be more competency-based, will promote learning and development, and will test higher-order skills of students, such as analytical skills, critical thinking skills, and conceptual clarity. Students will have examinations in Standard 3rd, 5th, and 8th, which will get conducted by the appropriate authority/board. Board exams for students of standard 10th and 12th will continued to be held but will be designed in such a way that they aim for holistic development of our students.

A new National Assessment Centre is proposed to be set-up, named, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), which will function as a academic standard-setting body.

Equitable and Inclusive Education

The new policy aims for achieving equitable and inclusive education for all. It believes that no one should lose any opportunity to get education because of reasons birth or socio-economic background. It lays special importance on SEDGs (Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups).

For this it proposes to set up Gender Inclusion Fund as well as Special Education Zones (SEZs) for disadvantaged regions, people and groups.

Children with disabilities will be assisted to take full participation in the regular education process from the school foundational stage to higher education level, with supporting teachers having cross disability training, various resource centres, accommodations, appropriate technology-based tools to assist them and overall support system to meet their special needs.

Each State/district will be asked to start "Bal Bhavans" as a special daytime boarding school, where students can participate in art, career, and play-related activities. School infrastructure when free can be used as Samajik Chetna Kendras.

Teacher Recruitment and Career Path

NEP recognizes the critical significance and role of teachers in the effective education delivery process. Therefore, it proposes reforms in the area of teacher recruitment and their career progression. It says that teacher recruitment system should be robust and transparent.

Promotions given to teachers should be based on merit, backed by performance-based appraisal system and clearly defined career progression paths.

For this NEP proposes setting up of a National Professional Standards for Teachers by National Council for Teacher Education by the year 2022. This has to be done in consultation with NCERT, SCERT, teachers and experts from different organizations from different levels and regions.

School Governance

School needs to be properly governed, ensuring proper availability of resources and infrastructure, libraries, and promoting professional community of teachers.

School Education - Standard-Setting and Accreditation

NEP recognizes the importance of setting standards against which performance could be measured, therefore it proposes to setup separate systems for policy framing, regulation, and

academic matters. State/UT will set up their independent State School Standards Authority (SSSA).

Schools will be made accountable to public through transparent public self-disclosure of all the basic regulatory information, as laid down by State School Standards Authority. The SCERT will be developing a School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF) in consultations with various stakeholders.

Higher Education – NEP 2020 proposes various changes in the higher education system in our country. Some of the important aspects are:

Increasing GER to 50 %

New education policy proposes to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (as per 2018 stats) to 50% by the year 2035. For this it is proposed to add 3.5 Crore new seats to Higher education institutions.

Holistic Multidisciplinary Education

The new education policy promotes a holistic multidisciplinary education system. Providing at Undergraduate level with flexible curriculum, creative subject combinations, integrating vocational education and creating several entry and exit points providing appropriate certification at different levels. For instance, Certificate if you complete 1-year, Advanced Diploma if you complete 2 years, Bachelor's Degree after completing 3 years and bachelor's degree with Research after completing 4 years duration.

A System of Digitally storing Academic credits

A system of Academic Bank of Credit is proposed to be established for storing digitally the academic credits earned by a student from different HEIs which can be transferred and to be counted in the process award of final degree.

Promotion to Research Culture in India

Major steps are proposed to promote the culture of Multidisciplinary Education and Research in our country. For this Universities which are into multidisciplinary education and research (MERUs) would be setup, which will be treated like IITs, IIMs, and would be of global standards. National Research Foundation is proposed to be setup as an apex body for promoting a strong research culture and research capacity in our country.

Regulation - Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)

For proper effective and proper regulation of HEIs in our country, Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is proposed to be set up, which will act as a single umbrella body for the whole system of higher education in our country (excluding medical and legal education). This HECI will have four independent divisions – namely, National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for the purpose of regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for the purpose of setting standard, Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for the purpose of funding, and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for the purpose of accreditation of HEIs. HECI will make extensive use of technology to function & will be empowered to punish HEIs who do not conform to the standards and norms setup by the

HECI. There will be same set of rules and regulations for all HEIs, whether Public or private, as regards, accreditation, academic standards, etc.

Re-Defining Universities.

The new policy proposes to clearly define university as institutions that are either Research-intensive Universities or Teaching-intensive Universities or Autonomous degree-granting Colleges.

Faculty Motivation

New policy adequately recognizes the significance of motivation and development of faculty and therefore has made recommendations towards the same. These recommendations are for capacity building, well-defined transparent recruitment, flexibility in designing curriculum and pedagogy, career progression, increasing faculty accountability, etc.

Teacher Education

It's proposed to frame a new National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, NCFTE 2021, by the NCTE jointly with NCERT. The minimum qualification for teachers would be a four years B.Ed program and stringent action would be taken against sub-standard Teacher Education Institutions.

Mentoring Mission

NEP recognizing the vital importance of mentoring in an individual's life proposes to establish a National Mission for Mentoring which will facilitate a big pool of accomplished senior academicians and retired faculty, to provide professional mentoring and support to teachers teaching in HEIs.

Supporting Meritorious Students Financially

NEP to incentivize meritorious students from SC, ST, OBC, and other SEDGs. The National Scholarship Portal will expand to support, enhance, and monitor the progress made by students on scholarships. Even HEIs, in private sector, will be asked to give more scholarships and subsidies to students.

Open and Distance Learning

The NEP intends to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio to 50% and for this open and distance learning model would play a big role. Several Measures are proposed to make it at par with high quality in-class teaching program like developing online courses, digital repositories, better student services, credit-based recognition of MOOCs, etc.,

Promotion to Online Education

In the wake of pandemics, NEP has realized the importance of developing a proper system of online education which is more prepared as an alternative mode of quality education, specially when in-person mode is not possible. For this, elaborate recommendations have been made in the NEP 2020. MHRD has been entrusted with the responsibility of creating a dedicated unit, which will develop digital infrastructure and content that will meet the e-education

needs of our education institutions.

Technology in Education - National Educational Technology Forum (NETF)

Recommendations have been made to further leverage technology into our education system by setting up an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF). It will assist in enhancing the use of technology in the process of learning, assessment, planning, and administration. Technology integration at all levels of education delivery will improve classroom teaching experience, access to education for disadvantaged groups, facilitating teacher development, assisting in overall education management.

Promotion to Indian languages and Internationalisation

NEP has made recommendations for enhanced use of Indian Languages as a medium of instruction in all HEIs ensuring preservation, growth, and vibrancy of all Indian languages. For this setting up of an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI), National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit, strengthening of Sanskrit and all language departments in HEIs, and use mother tongue/local language has been proposed. To match the best international practices, institutional collaborations would be facilitated and top Universities from world over would be allowed to set their campuses in India.

Professional Education

All HEIs would be providing professional education as a part of their curriculum. HEIs/universities which are into specific domain, like technical, health sciences, etc will be converted into multidisciplinary institutions.

Adult literacy and Education

The NEP also proposes to achieve the target of 100% literacy of our youth/adult.

Education Expenditure as a % of GDP

The government, both Centre as well as State, will make a joint effort to increase the public investment in Education sector to reach around 6% of GDP at the earliest, which at the moment is around 3%.

Conclusion

This education policy reform is expected to help India realise full benefit of its demographic dividend. With this major education system reform we can expect that India's education system will be at par with those of developed countries and that our children's future will be bright, in terms of better education and preparedness for future jobs. Strategies like this education reform to exploit the demographic window of opportunity that India has today, now needs to be properly implemented at grassroot level. We must remember that the challenges in meeting a range of goals related to education and health are bound to grow. The dreams of huge income flow and resultant economic growth due to demographic dividend could be realized only when we inculcate the required skills in the work force to make it as competent as its counterparts in the developed world.

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