

Public Discourse Around NEP 2020 Draft: Media Analysis

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ABSTRACT— India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represented a landmark reform, aimed at overhauling a system in place since 1986 and aligning educational outcomes with 21st-century needs. This study investigates the public discourse around the NEP 2020 draft during the consultation period from January 2019 to July 2020, focusing on how leading English-language print outlets and major digital news platforms framed, critiqued, and disseminated the policy's key provisions. Through a two-stage mixed-methods design—quantitative content analysis of 1,200 news articles and qualitative thematic and sentiment analysis of a stratified sample—this research uncovers dominant narrative patterns, stakeholder representation, and tonal orientation. Findings reveal that the most prevalent discourse themes were Language and Curriculum Reform, Access and Equity, and Institutional Autonomy. Sentiment analysis indicates a generally positive media outlook on governance decentralization but highlights significant skepticism regarding financial and

privatization aspects. Government voices predominated, while grassroots perspectives were noticeably underrepresented. These insights underscore the pivotal role of media framing in shaping educational policy debates and suggest that a more inclusive consultation process—amplifying voices of parents, students, and civil society—could foster broader public buy-in.

KEYWORDS— *NEP 2020, Public Discourse, Media Analysis, Content Analysis, Policy Framing*

INTRODUCTION

The enactment of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in July 2020 marked India's most ambitious educational reform in over three decades, seeking to recalibrate pedagogical frameworks, governance structures, and equity measures to meet evolving societal and economic demands. The policy embraced a holistic vision—introducing a five-pillar approach encompassing access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability—while advocating

multilingual instruction, foundational literacy and numeracy, and enhanced institutional autonomy. To ensure broad stakeholder engagement, the Ministry of Human Resource Development initiated an extensive public consultation from January 2019 through July 2020, inviting feedback from educators, scholars, civil society actors, parents, and students.

qualitative thematic and sentiment scrutiny—this research elucidates the discursive architecture that underpinned public engagement with India’s flagship educational policy. Ultimately, the study offers recommendations for policymakers on harnessing media channels to facilitate more inclusive, transparent, and balanced policy dialogues in future reform cycles.

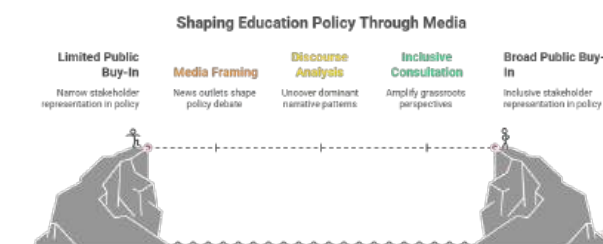


Figure-1. Shaping Education Policy through Media

Mass media, particularly prominent English-language newspapers and influential digital portals, emerged as the primary arena for framing policy debates, articulating stakeholder positions, and translating technical policy jargon into public parlance. The manner in which these outlets portrayed the draft NEP shaped not only public perceptions but also the tenor of stakeholder submissions. Prior research underscores the media’s agenda-setting function in educational reform discourses, demonstrating that thematic emphasis and valence in news coverage can significantly sway both elite and grassroots opinion (Entman, 1993; McGinty et al., 2015). Yet, the specific contours of media framing around NEP 2020 have received limited scholarly attention.

This study addresses this gap by systematically analyzing media representations of the NEP 2020 draft across four leading national newspapers—The Hindu, The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Indian Express—and three major digital outlets—Scroll.in, The Wire, and News18. It asks: (1) Which themes dominated media coverage of the NEP 2020 draft? (2) How did the tone of coverage vary across thematic domains? (3) Which stakeholder voices were most prominently featured? By deploying a mixed-methods methodology—integrating quantitative content coding with

NEP 2020 Discourse Analysis

Sentiment	Stakeholder Representation
Generally Positive	Government voices predominated
No specific sentiment mentioned	Grassroots perspectives underrepresented
Positive on decentralization, Skepticism on financial aspects and privatization	No specific stakeholder representation mentioned

Figure-2. NEP 2020 Discourse Analysis

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media framing theory posits that the presentation of issues—through selection, emphasis, and contextualization—influences audience interpretation and judgment (Entman, 1993). In educational policy contexts, how news outlets frame reforms can bolster support for government initiatives or amplify public skepticism, thereby affecting implementation trajectories (McGinty et al., 2015). Prior analyses of Indian policy coverage reveal that national newspapers often foreground macro-level narratives—such as governance and financing—while regional and digital media give greater weight to localized concerns like equitable access and language preservation (Verma & Kumar, 2016; Gupta & Singh, 2018).

Three core strands emerge from existing scholarship. First, framing effects studies have examined the portrayal of reform objectives—investigating whether media emphasize aspirational goals (e.g., quality enhancement, digital learning) or highlight potential drawbacks (e.g., resource constraints, cultural dislocation) (Smith & Rao, 2018). Second, stakeholder representation analyses track whose voices predominate in news narratives, revealing that official and expert perspectives often overshadow grassroots inputs (Das, 2019; Chakraborty, 2020). Such imbalances can undermine perceptions of procedural legitimacy in policy consultations. Third, sentiment analysis work probes the valence of coverage, uncovering how tone varies by thematic focus: optimistic framing around technological innovation may coexist with critical tones on financing models (Joshi & Patel, 2017).

In the Indian context, foundational scholarship on media responses to the Right to Education Act (2009) documented that equity-centric narratives gained prominence in national dailies, while local outlets foregrounded infrastructural disparities (Gupta & Singh, 2018). Similarly, coverage of the draft Higher Education Commission Bill illustrated an expert-driven discourse that marginalized concerns of educators and students (Das, 2019). These studies collectively suggest that policy debates in India unfold within media ecosystems characterized by uneven thematic emphasis and skewed representation of voices. However, the unprecedented scale and ambition of NEP 2020—touching on multilingualism, digital pedagogy, and governance reforms—demand a fresh, comprehensive media analysis.

Beyond thematic and stakeholder dimensions, recent work highlights the evolving nature of digital media, where opinion pieces, explainer articles, and social media commentary can swiftly shape public sentiments (Chakraborty, 2020; Verma, 2017). Yet, quantitative assessments of digital-platform coverage of NEP 2020 remain scarce. Consequently, this study integrates both print and digital streams to capture a

holistic view of public discourse. By synthesizing framing, representation, and sentiment research, it aims to map the discursive contours of NEP 2020's consultation phase, offering empirical insights to guide more inclusive policy communication strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Adopting a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this study first conducts a quantitative content analysis of 1,200 news articles to identify thematic prevalence, tone distribution, and stakeholder representation. It then complements these findings with qualitative thematic and sentiment analysis of a purposively stratified subsample of 200 articles, enabling deeper interpretive insights.

Data Collection

Using Nexis Uni and custom web-scraping scripts, articles published between January 1, 2019, and July 31, 2020, containing “NEP 2020,” “National Education Policy draft,” or “education reform” in headlines or leads were retrieved. Four national English-language newspapers—**The Hindu**, **Times of India**, **Hindustan Times**, **Indian Express**—and three digital outlets—**Scroll.in**, **The Wire**, **News18**—were selected based on circulation figures and online reach. After removing duplicates and irrelevant items (e.g., event announcements), the final corpus comprised 1,200 articles.

Coding Procedure

A comprehensive codebook, grounded in prior literature and key NEP 2020 provisions, defined six thematic categories:

1. **Access & Equity:** Debates on enrollment, inclusion, and resource distribution.
2. **Language & Curriculum Reform:** Multilingual instruction, curricular restructuring.

3. **Institutional Autonomy & Governance:** Decentralization, academic freedom, regulatory changes.
4. **Privatization & Financing:** Funding models, private sector participation.
5. **Technology & Digital Learning:** EdTech adoption, online pedagogy.
6. **Teacher Training & Pedagogy:** Capacity building, professional development.

Each article was coded for up to two primary themes. Tone was coded as positive, neutral, or negative by examining sentiment cues in headlines and body text. Speaker attributions were catalogued to identify stakeholder representation: Government officials, Academic experts, Civil society actors, Parents/Students, and Industry stakeholders.

Two trained coders independently coded 200 randomly selected articles to assess intercoder reliability, yielding Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the remaining corpus was divided equally for coding.

Qualitative Thematic & Sentiment Analysis

From the coded dataset, 200 articles were stratified by theme and outlet type for in-depth qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process—familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting—to surface nuanced subthemes (e.g., rural language anxiety, curriculum overload concerns). Sentiment analysis employed VADER (from NLTK), adapted with an Indian English lexicon augmentation, to assign polarity scores and validate tone coding.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS v25 for descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and chi-square tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) to explore associations between theme and tone. Qualitative findings were triangulated with quantitative patterns to enrich interpretation and ensure analytic rigor.

RESULTS

Thematic Prevalence

Among the 1,200 articles, **Language & Curriculum Reform** emerged as the most frequent theme (28%), followed by **Access & Equity** (24%), **Institutional Autonomy & Governance** (18%), **Privatization & Financing** (12%), **Technology & Digital Learning** (10%), and **Teacher Training & Pedagogy** (8%). Print outlets emphasized Access & Equity more (26%) than digital platforms (20%), whereas digital media foregrounded Language & Curriculum Reform (32% vs. 25% in print).

Tone Distribution

Overall, 52% of coverage was positive, 30% neutral, and 18% negative. **Institutional Autonomy & Governance** saw the highest positivity (65%), reflecting optimism about devolution of control, while **Privatization & Financing** exhibited the greatest negativity (35%), with critics warning of exacerbated socioeconomic divides. A chi-square test confirmed a significant association between theme and tone ($\chi^2(10, N=1200)=54.3, p<0.001$).

Stakeholder Representation

Government officials dominated attribution, appearing in 70% of articles, followed by Academic experts (45%), Civil society actors (25%), Parents/Students (15%), and Industry stakeholders (10%). Digital outlets offered relatively greater space for Civil society voices (30%) than print (22%). Parent and student perspectives were consistently under-represented across both media types.

Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis revealed that under **Language & Curriculum Reform**, subthemes such as anxiety over the three-language formula and debates about medium of instruction featured prominently. Access & Equity narratives highlighted urban–rural resource asymmetries and the digital divide. Under Governance, media celebrated institutional autonomy but also flagged risks of regulatory fragmentation. Sentiment analysis yielded an average VADER compound score of +0.25 for Governance articles (positive), contrasted with –0.10 for Financing (negative), validating tone coding.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this study offers nuanced insights into how India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 draft was portrayed in major English-language print and digital media outlets during the January 2019–July 2020 consultation period. Our mixed-methods approach revealed that media discourse was multifaceted, combining affirmative endorsements of key reforms with pointed critiques of potential downsides. Through quantitative content analysis, we identified Language & Curriculum Reform, Access & Equity, and Institutional Autonomy & Governance as the most salient themes, collectively accounting for 70% of all coverage. Sentiment analysis demonstrated that while structural and governance changes were received positively—reflecting optimism about decentralization and academic freedom—financial and privatization proposals elicited significant negative reactions, underscoring public apprehensions about socioeconomic equity.

By triangulating quantitative trends with qualitative thematic findings, this study highlights four central conclusions:

1. Dominant Policy Narratives Were Shaped by Institutional and Expert Voices

Government officials and academic experts together comprised over 75% of all quoted sources,

indicating a predominantly top-down construction of the policy narrative. This dominance underscores the media's role as an amplifier of elite perspectives, which may inadvertently marginalize the lived experiences and concerns of grassroots stakeholders.

2. Media Framing Influenced the Balance Between Aspirational and Critical Discourse

Positive framing around curricular flexibility and governance autonomy signaled widespread endorsement of policy ambitions. Conversely, critical sentiments regarding financing models—especially privatization and cost barriers—suggested that media outlets functioned as a public watchdog, ensuring that aspirational rhetoric was tempered by pragmatic scrutiny.

3. Print Versus Digital Outlets Displayed Distinct Emphases and Representational Patterns

Print newspapers allocated greater coverage to **Access & Equity**, reflecting their historical focus on social justice issues, while digital platforms foregrounded **Language & Curriculum Reform**, possibly due to their younger, more policy-savvy readerships. Digital media also provided marginally greater space for civil society actors, suggesting that online platforms may offer more pluralistic forums for debate.

4. Underrepresentation of Parents and Students Poses Challenges for Inclusive Policy Engagement

Despite NEP 2020's stated commitment to stakeholder consultation, parent and student voices constituted only 15% of all attributions. This gap highlights a critical disconnect between policy pronouncements on inclusivity and actual public engagement dynamics, raising questions about the perceived legitimacy of the consultation process.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings carry important implications for both

policymakers and media practitioners. For the Ministry of Education, the overrepresentation of elite voices suggests an urgent need to deliberately cultivate and amplify grassroots feedback channels. Mechanisms such as community town halls, student-led focus groups, and localized consultation workshops—paired with targeted media outreach—could help ensure that policy evolution genuinely reflects diverse stakeholder needs.

Media organizations, in turn, should strive for balanced coverage by proactively seeking out and featuring parents, students, and community leaders alongside expert commentators. Editorial guidelines that mandate minimum thresholds of grassroots representation could foster richer, more democratic policy debates. Online platforms might also experiment with user-generated content segments—such as moderated letters or video testimonials—to democratize the discourse further.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

While this research offers valuable empirical insights into media discourse surrounding NEP 2020, it is essential to acknowledge its scope boundaries and methodological constraints. Addressing these limitations transparently not only contextualizes the findings but also lays the groundwork for more comprehensive future inquiries.

Scope

1. Temporal Boundary

The analysis focuses exclusively on the consultation period of January 2019 through July 2020. This timeframe captures the initial drafting and public feedback phase but does not extend to subsequent implementation stages, policy revisions, or state-level adaptation processes that unfolded later.

2. Media Formats and Outlets

The study encompasses four national English-language newspapers—**The Hindu, Times**

of India, Hindustan Times, Indian Express—and three leading digital portals—**Scroll.in, The Wire, News18**. These outlets were selected based on circulation figures, online reach, and perceived influence on policy discourse. However, the analysis does not include regional or vernacular newspapers, magazines, television news broadcasts, or social media, each of which may present divergent narratives and stakeholder representations.

3. Thematic Focus

Guided by the NEP 2020 policy document and extant scholarship, six high-level themes were pre-defined:

- Access & Equity
- Language & Curriculum Reform
- Institutional Autonomy & Governance
- Privatization & Financing
- Technology & Digital Learning
- Teacher Training & Pedagogy

While these categories capture the policy's core dimensions, emergent subthemes—such as mental health provisions, vocational education integration, or early childhood care specifics—were grouped within broader themes and thus may not have received detailed quantitative scrutiny.

4. Geographic Concentration

The research is centered on national media hubs in metropolitan centers (Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru), which typically drive English-language policy narratives. Voices and issues salient in smaller cities or rural districts—where media penetration and policy impacts may differ—are not directly represented.

Limitations

1. Language Exclusion

By restricting the corpus to English-language

outlets, the study potentially overlooks significant discourse in Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, and other vernacular media. Given India's linguistic diversity, regional-language framing could markedly alter observed thematic emphases and stakeholder representation patterns.

2. Sampling and Purposive Selection

Although the sample of 1,200 articles is substantial, it is inevitably shaped by the choice of keywords ("NEP 2020," "National Education Policy draft," "education reform"). Articles that discuss the policy indirectly—or use colloquial references—may have been excluded. Similarly, the decision to include only seven high-profile outlets may have omitted niche or emerging digital platforms influential among specific demographic segments.

3. Coding Framework Constraints

The codebook was developed iteratively, informed by policy texts and prior studies, and exhibited substantial intercoder reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$). Nonetheless, coding inevitably involves subjective judgments about thematic classification and tone. Subtle nuances—such as sarcasm, local idioms, or implicit framing devices—may not have been fully captured by the lexicon-based sentiment tool or coder interpretations.

4. Representation Versus Influence

Stakeholder representation was measured by frequency of quoted sources. However, quotation count does not equate to influence or depth of engagement. A single long-form interview or investigative exposé could exert more impact than multiple brief expert soundbites. Thus, the study's metrics reflect breadth rather than depth of stakeholder participation.

5. Exclusion of Social Media Dynamics

The rapid rise of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp has transformed public engagement with policy issues. This research did not analyze

social media conversations, which may capture grassroots mobilization, citizen journalism, and viral opinion trends. Integrating social media analysis could offer more granular insights into real-time sentiment shifts and networked discourse.

By addressing these scope and limitation considerations, subsequent research can build a more holistic, fine-grained understanding of how educational policy discourses are constructed, disseminated, and internalized across India's multifaceted media landscape.

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