

Impact of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on Gender Inclusivity in Female Students in India's Education System

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Abstract: The National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant reform initiative in India's education sector, aiming to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment for all learners. This chapter analyses the impact of NEP 2020 on gender inclusivity among female students in primary, secondary, and higher education in India. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, drawing upon secondary sources such as the NEP 2020 policy document, government reports, UDISE+ data, AISHE reports, UNESCO publications, and relevant scholarly literature.

The paper examines the key gender-related provisions of NEP 2020, including the Gender Inclusion Fund, efforts to reduce dropout rates among girls, expansion of access to quality education, promotion of safe and inclusive learning environments, and initiatives to enhance female participation in higher education. It further analyses the extent to which these measures contribute to improving enrolment, retention, progression, and participation of female students across different educational levels.

The findings indicate that NEP 2020 has the potential to strengthen gender inclusivity by addressing structural barriers such as socio-economic disadvantages, limited educational access, safety concerns, and inadequate institutional support. However, the paper also identifies persistent challenges in implementation, including regional disparities, resource constraints, and the need for sustained monitoring and evaluation. The study concludes that while NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for advancing gender equity in education, its long-term effectiveness will depend on coordinated policy implementation, adequate funding, and continuous support for female students across all stages of education (Ministry of Education, 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, gender inclusivity, female students, primary education, secondary education, higher education, educational equity.

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Introduction

Education plays a transformative role in shaping individual capabilities, social progress, and national development. In the Indian context, ensuring equitable access to quality education for female students has been a persistent policy concern due to historical, socio-economic, and cultural barriers that have limited their participation in the educational system. Despite notable improvements in enrolment and literacy rates, gender disparities continue to affect female students' access to education, retention in schools, transition between educational levels, and participation in higher education (UNESCO, 2022). These disparities are often more pronounced in rural areas and among socio-economically disadvantaged communities, where factors such as poverty, early marriage, safety concerns, and inadequate educational infrastructure hinder girls' educational progression.

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant milestone in India's educational reform agenda. Introduced by the Ministry of Education, the policy seeks to transform the education system by emphasizing equity, inclusion, quality, and accessibility (Ministry of Education, 2020). One of the central objectives of

NEP 2020 is to ensure that no child is deprived of education due to gender, socio-economic background, geographical location, or other forms of disadvantage. The policy recognizes that gender equality in education is not merely a matter of increasing female enrolment but also involves creating supportive learning environments that enable female students to participate fully, continue their education, and achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

NEP 2020 introduces several provisions aimed at enhancing gender inclusivity. Among these, the Gender Inclusion Fund is a notable initiative designed to support states in implementing targeted interventions for promoting female education and reducing gender disparities (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy also emphasizes measures such as improving school infrastructure, ensuring safe transportation, providing scholarships and financial assistance, strengthening counselling and support services, and promoting gender-sensitive curricula. These interventions are intended to address the structural barriers that often impede female students' educational participation and progression.

At the primary education level, NEP 2020 seeks to improve access to foundational learning opportunities for girls and reduce early dropout rates. The policy's focus on universal access, early childhood care, and foundational literacy is particularly relevant for female students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may face barriers to entering and continuing schooling. In secondary education, the policy aims to reduce dropout rates among girls by addressing factors such as safety concerns, socio-economic constraints, and lack of supportive educational environments. Measures such as flexible learning pathways, vocational education, and improved school facilities can contribute to sustaining female students' participation during adolescence, a stage at which dropout rates often increase.

In higher education, NEP 2020 envisions expanding access and participation for female students through initiatives such as multidisciplinary institutions, flexible learning options, scholarships, and improved institutional support systems. The policy also seeks to enhance the quality and inclusivity of higher education institutions, thereby enabling female students to pursue diverse academic and professional opportunities. Increased female participation in higher education is crucial for promoting women's empowerment, improving employment prospects, and contributing to broader socio-economic development.

This chapter aims to analyse the impact of NEP 2020 on gender inclusivity among female students across primary, secondary, and higher education in India. By examining the policy provisions, implementation strategies, and available educational indicators, the chapter seeks to assess the extent to which NEP 2020 has contributed to improving access, retention, progression, and participation of female students. It also identifies the challenges and gaps that continue to hinder the realization of gender-inclusive education. Through this analysis, the chapter contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and provides insights into the potential and limitations of NEP 2020 in advancing gender inclusivity in India's education system.

Conceptual Framework: Gender Inclusivity in Education

Gender inclusivity in education refers to the creation of an educational environment in which learners of all genders, particularly female students, have equal opportunities to access, participate in, and benefit from quality education. It encompasses not only enrolment in educational institutions but also retention, progression, achievement, participation in decision-making, and the availability of safe and supportive learning environments (UNESCO, 2022). A gender-inclusive education system recognizes and addresses the social, cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that disproportionately affect female students and limit their educational opportunities.

The concept of gender inclusivity is closely linked to the broader principle of educational equity, which seeks to ensure fairness in educational access and outcomes. Educational equity acknowledges that students may require different forms of support depending on their social and economic circumstances. In the Indian context, female students often face barriers such as poverty, gender stereotypes, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, safety concerns, and inadequate educational infrastructure, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, achieving gender inclusivity requires targeted interventions that address these structural constraints and create

conditions conducive to sustained female participation in education.

One important theoretical perspective for understanding gender inclusivity is gender equality theory, which emphasizes equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for individuals regardless of gender. Applied to education, this perspective highlights the need to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure that female students have access to the same educational resources, opportunities, and learning experiences as their male counterparts. However, equality alone may not be sufficient, as female students often encounter unique barriers that require additional support. Consequently, the concept of gender equity is also relevant, as it focuses on providing the specific resources and interventions necessary to achieve fair educational outcomes.

Another relevant framework is social inclusion theory, which examines how certain groups may be excluded from full participation in social institutions, including education. Female students from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience multiple forms of exclusion based on gender, socio-economic status, caste, religion, disability, or geographical location. A gender-inclusive education policy must therefore adopt an intersectional approach that recognizes the diverse experiences and needs of female learners. Such an approach aligns with the objectives of NEP 2020, which emphasizes equitable and inclusive education for all learners (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Within this conceptual framework, gender inclusivity can be analysed through several key dimensions:

- **Access:** The extent to which female students are able to enrol in educational institutions at different levels.
- **Participation:** The degree of active involvement of female students in classroom activities, co-curricular activities, and institutional processes.
- **Retention:** The ability of female students to continue their education without dropping out.
- **Progression:** The transition of female students from one educational level to the next, such as from primary to secondary education and from secondary to higher education.
- **Learning outcomes:** The achievement of meaningful educational outcomes, including academic performance, skills development, and empowerment.
- **Supportive environment:** The availability of safe infrastructure, gender-sensitive curricula, counselling services, financial assistance, and institutional support mechanisms.

The National Education Policy 2020 incorporates these dimensions by emphasizing universal access, inclusive learning environments, reduction of dropout rates, and targeted support for disadvantaged groups. The policy's Gender Inclusion Fund, focus on safe school infrastructure, promotion of flexible learning pathways, and expansion of opportunities in higher education are intended to strengthen gender inclusivity across the educational spectrum (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This conceptual framework provides the basis for analysing the impact of NEP 2020 on female students in primary, secondary, and higher education. By examining the policy through the

dimensions of access, participation, retention, progression, and supportive learning environments, the chapter seeks to assess the extent to which NEP 2020 contributes to advancing gender inclusivity in India's education system.

Overview of NEP 2020 and Its Gender-Related Provisions

The National Education Policy 2020 is a landmark policy framework introduced by the Ministry of Education with the objective of transforming India's education system into one that is equitable, inclusive, multidisciplinary, and learner-centered (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy seeks to address long-standing challenges related to access, quality, affordability, and inclusivity in education. One of its central commitments is to ensure that no learner is deprived of educational opportunities due to gender, socio-economic background, geographical location, disability, or other forms of disadvantage.

Gender inclusivity occupies a prominent place in NEP 2020. The policy recognizes that female students often face systemic barriers that hinder their educational participation and progression. These barriers include poverty, social norms, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, safety concerns, inadequate school infrastructure, and limited access to higher education opportunities. To address these challenges, NEP 2020 proposes a range of targeted interventions aimed at improving access, retention, participation, and learning outcomes for female students across all levels of education.

One of the most significant gender-related provisions of NEP 2020 is the establishment of the Gender Inclusion Fund. This fund is intended to support states in implementing initiatives that promote female education and reduce gender disparities. According to the policy, the fund can be utilized for measures such as improving school infrastructure, providing transportation facilities, offering scholarships and financial assistance, and creating safe and supportive learning environments for girls (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Gender Inclusion Fund reflects the policy's recognition that targeted financial and institutional support is essential for addressing the specific challenges faced by female students.

NEP 2020 also emphasizes universal access to education, particularly at the foundational and school levels. The policy aims to achieve 100 percent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in school education from preschool to secondary level by 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2020). This objective is particularly relevant for female students, as universal access can help reduce gender disparities in enrolment and ensure that girls from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to enter and continue schooling. The policy further highlights the importance of early childhood care and education, which can provide a strong foundation for girls' educational development and long-term participation in the education system.

At the school education level, NEP 2020 proposes several measures to reduce dropout rates among girls and improve retention. These measures include the provision of safe and adequate school infrastructure, such as separate toilets for girls, access to clean drinking water, and secure transportation facilities. The policy also encourages flexible learning pathways and alternative educational opportunities for students who are unable to attend regular schooling due to socio-economic or personal constraints. Such provisions are important for supporting female students who may face interruptions in their education due to domestic responsibilities, health issues, or social pressures.

The policy further stresses the need for gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogy. NEP 2020 advocates for the integration of values such as equality, respect, and inclusion into the curriculum and teaching-learning processes. This approach aims to challenge gender stereotypes, promote positive attitudes toward female education, and create classroom environments where female students feel valued and empowered. Teacher training programs are also expected to incorporate gender sensitivity so that educators can better understand and respond to the needs of female learners.

Overall, NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for advancing gender inclusivity in India's education system. Its emphasis on targeted financial support, universal access, safe infrastructure, gender-sensitive pedagogy, and expanded higher education opportunities demonstrates a holistic approach to addressing gender disparities. However, the effectiveness of these provisions depends on their implementation at the state and institutional levels, as well as sustained monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the intended benefits reach female students across diverse socio-economic and geographical contexts.

Impact on Female Students in Primary Education

Primary education forms the foundation of a child's educational journey and plays a crucial role in shaping future learning opportunities. For female students, access to quality primary education is particularly significant because it contributes to literacy, cognitive development, social empowerment, and improved life outcomes. In India, gender disparities in primary education have historically been influenced by socio-economic constraints, cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, and limited awareness regarding the importance of girls' education (UNESCO, 2022). The National Education Policy 2020 seeks to address these barriers by promoting universal access, equitable participation, and supportive learning environments for all children, including girls.

One of the major objectives of NEP 2020 is to achieve universal access to education from the preschool level to secondary education. The policy emphasizes early childhood care and education as a critical stage for laying the foundation of learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). By strengthening access to foundational learning opportunities, NEP 2020 has the potential to improve the enrolment of female students in primary education, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas where girls may face barriers to school entry.

The policy's focus on foundational literacy and numeracy is also relevant to gender inclusivity. Female students who acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills at an early stage are more likely to continue their education and participate effectively in subsequent learning processes. NEP 2020 aims to ensure that all children attain foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3, thereby reducing learning gaps that can contribute to dropout and educational exclusion (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Another important aspect of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on safe and inclusive school environments. The availability of adequate infrastructure, including separate toilets for girls, clean drinking water, and safe transportation facilities, has a direct impact on female students' attendance and retention in primary schools. Studies have shown that inadequate sanitation facilities can discourage girls from attending school regularly, particularly as they grow older (UNESCO, 2022). By prioritizing gender-sensitive infrastructure, NEP 2020 aims to create conditions that encourage female students to attend and remain in school.

The Gender Inclusion Fund proposed under NEP 2020 is particularly relevant for primary education. The fund is intended to support states in implementing targeted interventions that promote female education and reduce gender disparities (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the context of primary education, this may include scholarships, transportation support, community awareness programs, and initiatives to improve school infrastructure. Such measures can help address the economic and social barriers that often prevent girls from accessing and continuing primary education.

NEP 2020 also recognizes the importance of community participation and parental awareness in promoting girls' education. In many communities, parental attitudes toward female education significantly influence enrolment and retention decisions. The policy encourages greater community engagement and awareness programs to emphasize the value of educating girls and to challenge gender stereotypes that may discourage female participation in education (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Overall, NEP 2020 has the potential to significantly enhance gender inclusivity in primary education by improving access, strengthening foundational learning, providing gender-sensitive infrastructure, and supporting targeted interventions for female students. If implemented effectively, these measures can contribute to higher enrolment rates, improved attendance, reduced dropout rates, and stronger educational foundations for girls, thereby promoting their long-term educational and socio-economic empowerment.

Impact on Female Students in Secondary Education

Secondary education represents a critical stage in the educational trajectory of female students, as it influences their academic progression, skill development, and future socio-economic opportunities. In India, the transition from primary to secondary education has historically been associated with increased dropout rates among girls due to factors such as poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, safety concerns, and inadequate school infrastructure (UNESCO, 2022). The National Education Policy 2020 seeks to address these barriers by promoting equitable access, retention, flexible learning pathways, and supportive educational environments for female students at the secondary level.

One of the key objectives of NEP 2020 is to ensure universal access to school education up to the secondary level (Ministry of Education, 2020). This objective is particularly significant for female students, as continuation beyond the primary stage is essential for reducing gender disparities in education and enhancing women's long-term empowerment. By expanding access to secondary schools and improving educational infrastructure, NEP 2020 aims to facilitate the transition of girls from primary to secondary education and reduce the likelihood of dropout.

The policy places strong emphasis on reducing dropout rates among girls. NEP 2020 recognizes that socio-economic constraints often force female students to discontinue their education during adolescence. To address this challenge, the policy advocates for targeted interventions such as scholarships, financial assistance, transportation facilities, and community support programs (Ministry of Education, 2020). These measures are intended to alleviate the economic burden on families and

encourage them to support the continued education of female students.

Another important provision of NEP 2020 is the promotion of safe and gender-sensitive school environments. Safety concerns, including harassment during travel and within school premises, can significantly affect female students' attendance and participation in secondary education. The policy emphasizes the need for secure school infrastructure, separate sanitation facilities for girls, safe transportation, and mechanisms to address gender-based discrimination and harassment. Such measures can contribute to creating an environment in which female students feel comfortable, respected, and motivated to continue their education.

NEP 2020 also introduces flexible learning pathways, which are particularly beneficial for female students who may face interruptions in their education due to family responsibilities or socio-economic constraints. The policy encourages the integration of vocational education and skill development into secondary education, thereby providing students with diverse learning opportunities and practical skills (Ministry of Education, 2020). For female students, vocational education can enhance employability, economic independence, and confidence, while also making secondary education more relevant to their future aspirations.

The policy further emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary learning, which can help female students develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and broader career aspirations. By moving beyond rote learning and encouraging experiential learning, NEP 2020 seeks to create a more engaging and inclusive educational experience. This approach can empower female students to participate actively in academic and co-curricular activities, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and leadership potential.

In addition, NEP 2020 highlights the importance of teacher training and gender-sensitive pedagogy. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping classroom attitudes and supporting female students' educational development. Gender-sensitive teaching practices can help challenge stereotypes, encourage equal participation, and provide a supportive learning environment for girls. Effective teacher training programs can therefore contribute to improving female students' engagement and academic performance in secondary education.

Overall, NEP 2020 has the potential to strengthen gender inclusivity in secondary education by addressing barriers related to access, safety, retention, and relevance of education. Through targeted interventions, flexible learning pathways, and supportive school environments, the policy can contribute to increased enrolment, reduced dropout rates, and enhanced participation of female students. If implemented effectively, these measures can enable female students to complete secondary education and pursue higher educational and professional opportunities.

Impact on Female Students in Higher Education

Higher education plays a crucial role in empowering women by expanding their knowledge, skills, employment opportunities, and participation in social and economic development. Increased participation of female students in higher education contributes not only to individual advancement but also to broader societal progress through improved workforce participation, leadership representation, and decision-making

capacity. Despite significant improvements in recent years, female students in India continue to face barriers in accessing and completing higher education, including financial constraints, social norms, limited institutional support, and concerns related to safety and mobility (UNESCO, 2022). The National Education Policy 2020 seeks to address these challenges by promoting equitable access, flexibility, inclusivity, and quality enhancement in higher education.

One of the major goals of NEP 2020 is to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50 percent by 2035 (Ministry of Education, 2020). This target is particularly significant for female students, as it aims to expand opportunities for women to pursue higher education across diverse disciplines and institutional settings. By increasing the capacity of higher education institutions and improving accessibility, NEP 2020 has the potential to enhance female participation in undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs.

The policy emphasizes multidisciplinary and holistic education, which can benefit female students by providing greater academic flexibility and exposure to diverse fields of study. NEP 2020 encourages the establishment of multidisciplinary institutions where students can choose courses across different disciplines according to their interests and career aspirations. This approach can help female students access non-traditional fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), where women have historically been underrepresented. Increased participation in such fields can contribute to reducing gender disparities in high-skill and high-income sectors.

NEP 2020 also introduces flexible entry and exit options in higher education. The policy allows students to pause and resume their studies, with appropriate certification at different stages of completion (Ministry of Education, 2020). This provision is particularly beneficial for female students who may experience interruptions in their education due to family responsibilities, marriage, health issues, or financial difficulties. Flexible learning pathways can enable women to continue their education without permanently discontinuing their academic pursuits.

Another important provision of NEP 2020 is the promotion of online and digital learning. The expansion of digital education can improve access to higher education for female students, especially those residing in remote or rural areas where physical access to educational institutions may be limited. Online learning platforms and digital resources can provide opportunities for women to pursue higher education while balancing domestic and professional responsibilities. However, the effectiveness of digital learning depends on addressing the digital divide, including access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy among female students.

The policy further emphasizes scholarships, financial assistance, and support systems for disadvantaged students. Financial constraints are a significant barrier to higher education for many female students, particularly those from low-income households. By expanding scholarship schemes and financial aid, NEP 2020 aims to reduce the economic burden on families and encourage greater female participation in higher education (Ministry of Education, 2020). In addition, the policy encourages institutions to establish support mechanisms such as counselling services, mentorship programs, safe campus environments, and

grievance redressal systems to address the specific needs of female students.

NEP 2020 also recognizes the importance of inclusive institutional environments in promoting gender inclusivity. Higher education institutions are encouraged to foster a culture of equality, respect, and non-discrimination. Safe campus infrastructure, gender-sensitive policies, and mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment are essential for ensuring that female students can participate fully in academic and campus life. Such measures can enhance female students' confidence, sense of belonging, and overall educational experience.

Overall, NEP 2020 has the potential to significantly enhance gender inclusivity in higher education by expanding access, providing flexible learning opportunities, promoting multidisciplinary education, and strengthening institutional support systems. If implemented effectively, these measures can contribute to increased female enrolment, improved retention and completion rates, greater participation in diverse academic fields, and enhanced empowerment of women through higher education.

Challenges and Implementation Gaps

While the National Education Policy 2020 provides a comprehensive framework for promoting gender inclusivity among female students, its successful implementation faces several challenges. These challenges are rooted in socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, infrastructural limitations, administrative constraints, and uneven policy execution across states and institutions. Addressing these implementation gaps is essential for ensuring that the intended benefits of NEP 2020 reach female students at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels.

One of the major challenges is regional disparity in educational infrastructure and resources. India's diverse socio-economic landscape means that the availability of schools, qualified teachers, sanitation facilities, transportation, and digital resources varies significantly across regions. Female students in rural and remote areas often face greater difficulties in accessing quality education due to inadequate school infrastructure and long travel distances (UNESCO, 2022). Although NEP 2020 emphasizes universal access and safe educational environments, the implementation of these provisions requires substantial investment and coordinated efforts at the state level.

Another important challenge is the persistence of socio-cultural barriers that affect female students' educational participation. In some communities, traditional gender norms continue to prioritize domestic responsibilities and early marriage over girls' education. Such attitudes can lead to lower enrolment, irregular attendance, and higher dropout rates among female students, particularly at the secondary level. NEP 2020 recognizes the need for community participation and awareness programs; however, changing deeply entrenched social norms requires sustained engagement with families, local communities, and civil society organizations (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Financial constraints also remain a significant barrier to gender inclusivity in education. Many families, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, may struggle to bear the direct and indirect costs of educating girls, such as tuition fees, transportation, uniforms, books, and opportunity costs related to household responsibilities. While NEP 2020 proposes

scholarships, financial assistance, and the Gender Inclusion Fund, the effectiveness of these measures depends on adequate funding, transparent allocation mechanisms, and timely delivery of benefits to eligible female students.

The digital divide presents another critical implementation gap, particularly in the context of higher education and digital learning initiatives. NEP 2020 promotes the use of technology and online education to expand access and flexibility. However, many female students in rural and low-income households may lack access to smartphones, computers, reliable internet connectivity, and digital literacy training. This digital disparity can limit their ability to benefit from online learning opportunities and may reinforce existing educational inequalities.

Safety and security concerns continue to affect female students' participation in education. Concerns related to harassment during travel, inadequate campus safety measures, and gender-based violence can discourage girls and women from attending educational institutions regularly. Although NEP 2020 emphasizes safe and inclusive learning environments, effective implementation requires robust grievance redressal mechanisms, gender-sensitive institutional policies, secure transportation facilities, and awareness programs that promote respect and equality within educational settings.

Another challenge is the need for gender-sensitive teacher training and institutional practices. Teachers and educational administrators play a crucial role in shaping the learning environment and influencing students' experiences. Without adequate training in gender sensitivity, educators may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or fail to address the specific needs of female students. NEP 2020 advocates for teacher development and inclusive pedagogy, but the successful integration of gender-sensitive practices into classroom teaching and institutional administration requires systematic capacity-building initiatives.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also essential for assessing the impact of NEP 2020 on gender inclusivity. Reliable data on enrolment, retention, progression, learning outcomes, and participation of female students are necessary for identifying gaps and measuring progress. However, inconsistencies in data collection, reporting, and analysis can hinder evidence-based policymaking and limit the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of gender-related interventions. Strengthening educational data systems and conducting regular gender-focused assessments can support more informed policy implementation.

In summary, while NEP 2020 offers a strong policy framework for advancing gender inclusivity in education, several implementation gaps must be addressed to achieve its full potential. Overcoming regional disparities, socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, digital exclusion, safety concerns, and institutional limitations will require sustained investment, community engagement, capacity building, and rigorous monitoring. Addressing these challenges can strengthen the policy's impact and contribute to creating a more equitable and inclusive education system for female students in India.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative framework aimed at creating a more equitable, inclusive, and learner-centered education system in India. This

chapter has analysed the impact of NEP 2020 on gender inclusivity among female students across primary, secondary, and higher education. The analysis indicates that the policy provides a comprehensive set of provisions designed to address gender disparities by improving access, retention, participation, progression, and the quality of educational experiences for female students.

At the primary education level, NEP 2020 emphasizes universal access, foundational literacy and numeracy, and the development of safe and supportive school environments. These measures have the potential to enhance enrolment and reduce early dropout among female students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In secondary education, the policy's focus on reducing dropout rates, providing flexible learning pathways, improving infrastructure, and ensuring safe educational environments can contribute to sustained participation of girls during adolescence, a stage when gender disparities often become more pronounced.

In higher education, NEP 2020 seeks to expand opportunities for female students through multidisciplinary institutions, flexible entry and exit options, digital learning initiatives, scholarships, and institutional support systems. These provisions can promote greater female participation in diverse academic fields and contribute to women's empowerment by enhancing their educational attainment, employability, and leadership potential. The policy's emphasis on gender-sensitive curricula, teacher training, and inclusive institutional practices further supports the creation of learning environments that respect and encourage female students.

Despite these positive provisions, the chapter has also identified several challenges and implementation gaps that may limit the realization of gender inclusivity under NEP 2020. Regional disparities in infrastructure and resources, persistent socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, digital exclusion, safety concerns, and limited institutional capacity continue to affect female students' educational opportunities. The effectiveness of NEP 2020 therefore depends not only on the strength of its policy framework but also on the adequacy of funding, administrative coordination, community engagement, and continuous monitoring of gender-related educational indicators.

To strengthen the impact of NEP 2020 on gender inclusivity, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Strengthen implementation of the Gender Inclusion Fund by ensuring transparent allocation of resources and targeted support for regions and communities with high gender disparities.
- Improve educational infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas, by providing safe school buildings, separate sanitation facilities for girls, reliable transportation, and secure campus environments.
- Expand financial support mechanisms, including scholarships, stipends, and other forms of assistance for female students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Promote community awareness and social mobilization to challenge gender stereotypes, discourage early

marriage, and encourage families to support girls' education.

- Address the digital divide by improving access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy training for female students, especially in rural and low-income households.
- Enhance gender-sensitive teacher training so that educators can create inclusive classrooms, encourage equal participation, and respond effectively to the needs of female students.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data on enrolment, retention, progression, learning outcomes, and participation across all educational levels.
- Foster institutional accountability and coordination among central and state governments, educational institutions, and community organizations to ensure consistent implementation of gender-inclusive measures.

In conclusion, NEP 2020 has the potential to significantly advance gender inclusivity in India's education system by addressing structural barriers and promoting equitable opportunities for female students. However, achieving the policy's objectives requires sustained commitment from policymakers, educational institutions, communities, and other stakeholders. Through effective implementation, adequate resource allocation, and continuous evaluation, NEP 2020 can contribute to creating an education system in which female students are empowered to access, participate in, and benefit from quality education at all levels. Such progress is essential not only for the advancement of women but also for the broader social and economic development of India.

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