

# The Future of Adult Education with the National Education Policy, 2020

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## Abstract

With a large number of Indian population gradually moving towards attaining the status of elderly, it has become important to contemplate about the vital aspect of ensuring successful aging. Successful aging of a population not only has individual and personal benefits but also contributed to economic growth and development of a nation. One of the key processes of successful aging is maintaining active engagement with life; one of the ways of ensuring which is engaging in adult literacy and educational programmes. With a significant number of Indian elderly being either illiterate or low in education, their education has become a cause for concern which is addressed by the vibrantly designed National Education Policy, 2020. The provisions of National Education Policy, 2020 are directed and targeted to ensure enhanced adult literacy and education with critical inputs and instructions given to attain the lofty goals of adult and continuing education. In this article, we attempt to understand the need and importance of adult education as well as understand the key drivers of a good adult education policy. Within the light of this, we assess the specifications of the National Education Policy, 2020 and envision the bright future envisaged for the seekers of lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy, 2020, adult education, lifelong learning, continuing education.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important components of aging successfully is maintaining and demonstrating and active engagement with life (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). For the elderly individuals, being actively engaged with life takes many forms, such as maintaining a physically active lifestyle, maintaining social engagements, partaking in leisure activities etc. (Leon, 2005). Rowe and Kahn's (1997) model of successful aging emphasizes clearly on the critical nature of being engaged with life thus emphasizing that in order to ensure the growth, development and wellbeing of the elderly individuals of a community and a nation, it is critical to devise strategies to ensure elderly participation in social life and encouraging their keen interest in their own wellbeing and development. According to them, active engagement with life refers to Active engagement with life refers to social relations and productive activities which include being in contact with others, having frequent interactions with others, participating in exchange of information with others, offering and receiving emotional support, which is an integral aspect of achieving successful aging. In a study done by Sloane-Seale and Kops (2010), it was observed that engaging in education in late life is closely

associated with enhanced positive physical and psychological activities, thus resulting in enhanced health and wellbeing, an optimistic sense of self, greater focus on self-development, regeneration and growth, a better and more fruitful association with the community which play a important role in successful aging. This association is especially important for Indian population. The population of Indian elderly is projected to grow to 173 million by 2026, according to Elderly In India (2016) report released by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, and therefore, it is imperative that measures to ensure healthy and successful aging for elderly is created.

## 2. Lifelong Learning

One of the most effective ways of ensuring successful aging is through enabling and assisting them in the process of obtaining lifelong learning. The term "lifelong learning" refers to all learning processes carried out within the span of one's lifetime in order to develop the skills, competencies and qualifications one possesses. The expression of "competencies" refers to the knowledge and skills which one has become proficient in and have applied in particular contexts. The expression of "qualifications" refers to the formal manifestation of the vocational and

the professional capabilities of a worker which is recognized at sectoral, national and international level. The phrase of “employability” refers to the transferable skills and capabilities which increase the aptitude of an individual to effectively utilize the education and opportunities for training for securing and maintaining jobs, advancing and improving within the enterprise and between work profiles and coping with the transformations in the technological conditional and labour market fluctuations (ILO, 2003). According to OECD, the all-encompassing definition of lifelong learning is ‘what people learn across their entire lifespan’. Lifelong learning usually encompasses all the learning which takes place from cradle to the grave, ie, the early childhood education to provision to training after retirement comes under the purview of lifelong learning. As opposed to traditional forms of learning lifelong learning is universal in nature, thereby including all individuals and all life stages. The vision of lifelong learning is to provide to the participants the drive and enthusiasm, financial capabilities and physical access to learn at any point of time or stage of their lives, so that they can develop new skills, upgrade existing skills or learn new skills to work for his own satisfaction. Adult learning refers to the learning which occurs in adulthood, post compulsory education and includes higher education which one obtains after attaining the compulsory education (Boeren, 2016)

Lifelong learning is considered to be of great importance primarily due to two reasons. The first being the need to remain skilled and competitive to ensure our survival in a knowledge-

based economy and the second being creating an enhanced level of social cohesion and sense of active citizenship which will promote the living conditions of the society. Adult education and lifelong learning both ensure the attainment of these chief aims. According to Delors et al (1996), lifelong learning serves two primary aims, which are related to economic and social goals respectively. The ‘learning to know’ and ‘learning to do’ constituents of lifelong learning directly address the economic goals, which are the necessities of participating in a qualification-based and vocationally-oriented education system in order to thrive in a competitive society. The

‘learning to be’ and ‘learning to live together’ constituents of lifelong learning address the social goals, which are associated with the individual’s growth of self and enhancing the degrees of societal cohesiveness.

In order to ensure provision of lifelong learning opportunities, it is of critical importance that the individuals are provided with ample opportunities for learning. Participation in learning activities is dependent upon the provision of opportunities of learning activities, indicating that a small number of individuals are able to reap the benefits of adult learning opportunities. Within the formal system of education, there are strict rules which govern the access of education and conditions are enforced which determines who is able to participate and who isn’t, thus creating a ‘ladder like’ structure (Vermeersch et al., 2009) within which only those who have been exposed to the lower rungs of the ladder are given the opportunities to advance to the subsequent higher rungs. Within the lowest levels are the opportunities for achievement are the primary and secondary education, which is mandatory for acquisition in the developed nations. In order to ensure equal and equitable opportunity of lifelong learning, it is of utmost importance that these programs be adequately provided to the adult learners (OECD, 2010). Provision of Basic Skills Education and Second Chance Education is imperative to help the individuals enhance their learnings to levels which will enable them to participate in higher education courses to obtain the desired levels of education, knowledge and skills. Not only is

it important to ensure provision of educational services and facilities suited to the requirements of the adult learner, but also it is of critical significance that the educational services are provided to them at suitable venue and times since it is a difficult proposition for a disadvantaged individual to travel to distant location for obtaining education. Often times, the individual interested in attaining lifelong learning services might be engaged in routine manual jobs or they might be temporarily unemployed and resultantly, not get as many opportunities for skill enhancement at the workplace. Thus, for such a population, it becomes the role of the public sector to make available lifelong learning courses

so that such individuals can contribute to their own and the society's wellbeing by retraining themselves or updating their knowledge and skills required in order to participate in a new occupation. The National Education Policy, 2020 places importance in public sector and private sector collaborations in provisions of lifelong learning opportunities of such a nature. Yet another important consideration to be kept in the forefront is that adult education seekers often prefer to blend their learning activities with other life domains, such as work and family responsibilities, thus it becomes of great consequence that opportunities of learning are designed to be flexible enough to accommodate such eventualities. According to Schuetze and Slowey (2002), the key difference in traditional mode of education and lifelong learning mode of education is that for adult learners, it is difficult to access traditional mode of education as the adult learners find it demanding to obtain the crucial set of entrance qualifications which will enable them to participate in campus based educational programs which is offered generally in full time form. On the other hand, the lifelong learning mode represents a flexible model, wherein based on prior qualifications and accomplishments, the participants can select preferred courses, which are provided to them in a modular format thus providing greater autonomy and self sufficiency to the participants for selecting their own pace and method of study. Online courses provide quality education using such a revolutionary paradigm, subsequently, removing some institutional barriers and enabling the learners to obtain education in their own preferred environments. Thus, it is of vital relevance to understand that the format in which adult education programs are provided determine the effectiveness and the success of the program as well as shape the decision of the adult learner to participate in the lifelong learning pursuits. Courses offered at inconvenient times with minimal flexibility usually find less takers and thus don't fulfill the aims of lifelong learning and education (Pont, 2004)

### 3. National Education Policy, 2020

In 2015, India adopted the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SD)." Under this agenda, Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and

promote lifelong learning opportunities to all by 2030." Based on five main foundation pillars, namely, access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability, the National Education Policy, 2020 has been created to be aligned to and bring to fruition the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Panditrao & Panditrao, 2020). One of the shining qualities of the National Education Policy, 2020, with regards to adult education and literacy is the clear and distinguishable goals which has been set in order to achieve the aims.

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India centered education system by considering its traditional, cultural, ethical foundations to contribute directly to remodel the nation into an equitable, imperishable society. The foundation of the entire Indian Education System rests on the inspiration drawn from the vast and vibrant historical heritage and upon the enlightening contributions from the many scholars to the world in diverse fields. The objective of the currently announced NEP 2020 is to provide a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary liberal education to every aspirant to raise the current gross enrolment ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035. (National Educational Policy, 2020)

The possibility of obtaining education and attaining basic literacy is considered to be a basic right for each and every citizen of a country. It is well established that obtaining basic literacy and education helps an individual advance personally and professionally, as well as find exposure to various opportunities to enhance himself personally and economically. Education can be considered to be a force multiplier augmenting the results and accomplishments of the critical developmental efforts taking place, as could be seen in the close associations between the literacy rates and per capita GDP.

The disadvantages an uneducated member of a society faces are numerous and manifold, from being unable to carrying out basic financial transactions to not being able to utilise the benefits of the internet for professional and personal growth, to having one's own safety compromised, the life of an uneducated individual is truly difficult to say the least. The new vision of adult education aims to bring about such new and advantageous results which will help the members

of the society in not only becoming aware of one's own but also develop skills and competencies which will enable him to lead a fulfilling life.

For the success of adult education and literacy, one of the most important factors is volunteerism and community involvement along with mobilization. For ensuring success and attainments of goals set for adult education, one needs not only political direction but also financial and organisational support, effective planning and capacity building measures and initiatives for the providers of literacy, ie, the educators and volunteers. Success of literacy programmes is associated with not only increased literacy amongst adults, but also a greater demand of education amongst the young adults of the community.

The National Education Policy, 2020 aims at meeting the urgent needs of adult literacy and education by bringing to fore some key drivers. One of them involves developing a curriculum framework dedicated to adult education. This curriculum framework will be created by a body of NCERT and will incorporate a minimum of five different types of programmes, focusing specifically on ensuring the attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills, life skills pertaining to financial and digital literacy, health care and awareness, child care and education, family welfare, development of vocational skills, which will bring an impetus to local employment, basic education and continuing education, which will constitute of adult education courses on not only arts, science and technology, sports and recreation but also other topics of interest to local learners. Care will be taken to ensure that teaching-learning methods suited for the adults are utilised within the framework to impart such innovative education. Through such measures, inclusivity in education will be brought forth, thereby, making the curriculum applicable and relevant for the elderly individuals.

In the National Education Policy, 2020, Infrastructural deficits will be addressed and support will be given to augment adult education and lifelong learning. One of the most dynamic initiative in this area would be to ensure the provision for the utilisation of school complexes on weekends and after school hours and inclusion

of ICT-enabled adult education courses in public libraries as well as providing community and volunteerism based support will provide the much needed community engagement and drive required for the success of these initiatives. Adult Education Centres (AECs) have also been envisaged to be included within well established public institutions such as vocational training centres and higher education institutions.

Yet another critical provision of the National Education Policy, 2020 is provision of training of instructors to effectively guide the learning enterprise by the National, State and district level resource support institutions. These instructors will be trained by the superordinate body to provide effective, sensitive and application teaching and training in all five varieties of education described in the National Education Policy, 2020 and coordinate with volunteer instructors. The members of the community will be urged to participate in short term training courses and volunteer as adult literacy instructors and tutors. Such an act will be counted as an important national service. Non-governmental organisations will also be functioning collaboratively with the States to augment and support the actions taken to advance adult literacy and education. One of the key steps which will be taken in this direction would be spreading the advertisements, announcements and initiatives pertaining to adult education with the help of local organisational bodies and non-governmental organisations. The network and support of social workers and counsellors will be imperative in building a database of students enrolled and not enrolled or dropped out of adult education initiatives. In order to meet the goals of adult literacy and educations, the non enrolled and dropped out students will be referred to local Adult Education Centres (AECs) The National Education Policy, 2020 also calls for strengthening and augmenting the availability and accessibility of books in order to develop a reading habit and culture within communities and educational institutions. The policy recommends strengthening and modernization of educational institutions and public libraries to cater to the needs of all students, including those who are persons-with-disabilities. It has been decreed that books be made affordable and accessible to all

citizens and that both private and public sector organisations devise ways to enhance the quality and allure of the books published in Indian languages. In order to enhance accessibility, digitisation of books will also be carried out. Creation of jobs is also a major aspect within the agenda of making the libraries vibrant and effective by appointing library staff and devising career pathways for them. Strengthening of existing libraries, setting up of rural libraries, mobile libraries, children's reading rooms in disadvantaged areas, encouraging the development of social books clubs for cultivating associations between libraries and educational institutions and translating and making available the reading material in various Indian languages of are some concrete steps devised in ensuring widespread adult education by the National Education Policy, 2020. This measure is specially beneficial to the elderly as it becomes convenient and accessible for them to obtain education in the language which they feel most comfortable in.

Information and communication technologies are well established measures that are seen by the OECD countries to be effective in enhancing and broadening lifelong learning and education in an affordable, cost-effective way (OECD, 2001). With the help of technological improvements, such as satellite-based television channels, online books, adult education initiatives can be provided through online or blended learning mode. Thereby, ensuring that the elderly are able to access education from the comforts of their own homes in the times most convenient for them Yet another way of enhancing lifelong learning is through creating workplaces which have 'decentralised and flatter management structures; encouragement of employees to reflect upon their experiences; the use of team-based production; and through exposing workers to new problems in the production process' (OECD, 2000d). This observation serves to reiterate the importance of seeing lifelong learning as an integrated, and integrating, policy framework, and not just as a matter for education portfolios

#### 4. Conclusion

The National Education Policy, 2020 is a much-needed step in the direction of ensuring quality education for all. Specifically, in the case of elderly individuals, who have been deprived of

education, the policy brings about several welcome transformations which will ensure that they are able to obtain new skills, polish existing skills and live their lives with dignity and self-respect which education brings. The policy measures and guidelines herald a new era of education, of which, inclusivity, sustainability and growth are hallmarks. With successful aging taking the forefront for national development, the measures for providing encompassing measures of accessibility of education ensures that each and every one reaps the fruits of education. The future is indeed very bright in the area of lifelong learning and adult and continuing education.

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