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Gender Inclusivity in the New Education Policy: Transforming Educational Landscapes Through Comprehensive Reform

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Abstract:

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India represents a paradigmatic shift towards creating inclusive educational environments with equal opportunities for every student that recognize and address gender disparities across all levels of education and creating more egalitarian environment to work and learn. This research examines the gender-inclusive provisions within the NEP 2020, analysing their theoretical foundations, implementation strategies, and potential impact on educational equity. Through a comprehensive review of policy documents, existing literature, and theoretical frameworks, this study explores how the NEP 2020 addresses historical gender inequities in Indian education through structural reforms, pedagogical innovations, and institutional changes. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of policy documents with theoretical examination of gender-inclusive education models. Key findings indicate that the NEP 2020 incorporates significant gender-inclusive measures including flexible learning pathways, recognition of diverse gender identities, elimination of gender stereotypes in curriculum, and provisions for creating safe educational spaces. However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in rural contexts and marginalized communities. The study concludes that while the NEP 2020 provides a robust framework for gender inclusivity, sustained efforts in policy implementation, teacher training, and community engagement are essential for realizing its transformative potential in creating truly gender-inclusive educational environments.

Keywords: New Education Policy, gender inclusivity, educational equity, inclusive education, gender identity, educational reform

1. Introduction:

Education serves as a fundamental pillar for societal transformation which creates a platform to nurture as a good individual and promote empowerment for everyone may it be girl or a boy, yet gender-based disparities have historically promoted limited access to quality education for many individuals across diverse gender identities. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India emerged

as a comprehensive developing framework designed to address such inequalities inequities through innovative and inclusive educational approaches. This policy represents a paradigm shift from traditional educational models to newly enhanced version of study patterns by explicitly recognizing the need for gender-inclusive practices.

The concept of gender inclusivity in education extends beyond binary gender considerations to encompass a broader understanding of gender diversity, including transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals. This enlarged and promoting perspective aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize on the importance of creating learning environments where all students can build their personality and have plenty of opportunity to upgrade their learning status and be a better individual to serve the society, regardless of their gender identity or expression. The NEP 2020's approach gender inclusivity as growing recognition and concern that educational systems must evolve to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse gender and sexuality status of student and to promote more educational opportunities.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Historical Context of Gender in Indian Education in evolving times:

The landscape of gender and education in India has been shaped by complex historical, societal, cultural, and economic factors that have promoted disparities in educational access and outcome turned out to be one sided that is always in more favour of boy being superordinate gender and women lacked being subordinate gender in the society. The traditional gender roles and societal expectations have significantly influenced educational opportunities, where women have a societal role of being a housewife and give emotional care and support to men whereas men termed as to be a breadwinner for the family, that gives him more right to access education in context to women. With this historical data showing substantial gaps in literacy rates, enrolment patterns, and educational achievement between different gender groups (Ramachandran et al., 2004). The colonial educational system further promoted these disparities by creating gap between gender-specific educational tracks that reinforced traditional role divisions between men and women Post-independence educational policies have made progressive attempts to address gender inequities, with initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act which contributing to improved access to education for girls and marginalized communities. However, these efforts primarily focused on binary gender categories and did not adequately address the needs of gender-diverse populations or challenge underlying gender stereotypes embedded in educational practices (Srivastava, G. 2017).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Gender-Inclusive Education with promotion of education for diverse sexuality:

Gender-inclusive education draws from multiple theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of recognizing and valuing gender diversity in educational settings. Social constructivist

theory, as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), provides a foundation for understanding how gender identities are socially constructed and how this educational gap can be analysed in the society. The educational environments can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms and creating a gap between prevailing upgradation and societal role norms. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping learning experiences and identity development.

Feminist pedagogy, developed by scholars such as (hooks1994) and (Freire1970), offers critical insights into how educational practices have perpetuatedand dismantled the gender-based power structures. The feminist lens came with the perspective to encourage women's education and promoting gender-based equality in the society by giving platform to women to educate and stood up for their rights by having a critical observation on what is wrong and right in the society. This approach advocates for changing the educational practices that challenged traditional hierarchies by promoting equal education importance and stronger wings to women. This will create more equitable learning environments for all students instead of facing biasness on the basis of gender. The integration of feminist pedagogical principles in educational policy represents a significant advancement in creating more inclusive educational spaces

Queer theory, as developed by Butler (1990) and other scholars, provides additional theoretical grounding for understanding gender diversity and the importance of creating positive educational environments that accommodates non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals which will give equal opportunity for every gender to empower then through education and stating better mindset for their individual thoughts and brooder their mindsets to more gender promotional strategies. This theoretical framework challenges binary gender growth advocates for more fluid and inclusive approaches to gender identity in educational contexts.

2.3 International Perspectives on Gender-Inclusive Education:

International educational systems have increasingly recognized the importance of gender-inclusivity as many gender have been identified and government is being very critical and opening various comforting lenses to safeguard the gender interest and promoting education on equal grounds. Countries such as Canada, Sweden, and New Zealand implementing comprehensive policies to address gender diversity in education. The UNESCO Framework for Action on Education 2030 emphasizes the importance of inclusive education that addresses the needs of all learners, regardless of gender identity or expression (UNESCO, 2015). These international examples provide valuable insights for understanding best practices in gender-inclusive education policy development and implementation.

3. Objectives of the Study:

To comprehensively analyse the gender-inclusive provisions within the New Education

Policy 2020 with evaluation of their potential impact for creating more equitable educational environments for learners across all gender identities and giving them equal rights to uplift and promote educational rights despite of any kind of gender disparity.

1. To examine the theoretical foundations and constructivelyinclined with underlying gender-inclusive approaches in the NEP 2020

2. To identify specific policy measures designed to address gender disparities in education

3. To analyse the implementation strategies proposed for ensuring gender inclusivity across educational levels

4. To evaluate the potential challenges and opportunities for successful implementation of gender-inclusive provisions

5. To assess the alignment of NEP 2020's gender inclusivity measures with international best practices

6. To propose recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of gender-inclusive education policies

4. Theoretical Framework and Justification for Gender-Inclusive Approach:

4.1 Theoretical Justification:

The adoption of a gender-inclusive approach in educational policy is grounded in several interconnected theoretical frameworks that collectively support the need for comprehensive educational reform. Social justice theory provides a fundamental justification for gender-inclusive education by emphasizing the moral imperative to create equitable opportunities for all individuals regardless of their gender identity. This theoretical perspective, as articulated by Rawls (1971) and later developed by Fraser (2008), argues that educational institutions have a responsibility to address historical inequities and create conditions for all learners to achieve their full potential and create equal opportunities for one and all.

The capabilities approach, developed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000), focused on additional theoretical support for gender-inclusive education by emphasizing the importance of developing human capabilities and freedom with respect to gender prospects. This framework suggests that education should provide individuals to identify their capabilities without being constrained by traditional gender role expectations and giving them platforms and to challenge the societal limitations based on gender identity. The NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic development and multiple pathways to learning aligns with this theoretical perspective by recognizing that different individuals and gender prospects may require different educational approaches to identify their potential and break stereotypes for various gender that came across any discrimination in the past.

Intersectionality theory, as developed by Crenshaw (1989), provides crucial insight over discrimination in discrimination, on how gender intersects with other identity categories such as

caste, class, religion, and disability which create unwanted hierarchy in the society and create a lot of educational challenges. This theoretical framework supports the NEP 2020's comprehensive approach to inclusion by recognizing different gender and create pro gender-inclusive education policywhich actively addresses on multiple forms of discrimination and protect the vulnerable section of the society. Itgivethepolicy's emphasis on inclusive education practices reflects an understanding of these intersectional dynamics prevalent in the society and constructive multifaceted approaches to prmote educational equity.

4.2 Pedagogical Justification:

From a pedagogical perspective, concentrated on the gender-inclusive approaches which are supported by extensive research demonstrating and the benefits of inclusive educational practices for all learners undifferentiated of the gender. Cooperative learning theory, developed by Johnson (2009), suggests that diverse learning environments enhance educational outcomes by exposing students of different perspectives and increase their thinking capability of problem-solving and understanding positive development strategies. Gender-inclusive classrooms naturally create these diverse learning environments by bringing together students with varied experiences and perspectives related to gender identity and expression which enhances the level of perception and improve their level of living by giving them equal opportunity.

Multiple intelligences theory, proposed by Gardner (1983), provides additional pedagogical justification for gender-inclusive approaches by recognizing that individuals have different strengths and learning preferences that may not align to the traditional gender stereotypes. Educational practices that accommodate diverse learning styles and interests, regardless of gender associations, are more likely to support the academic success of all students. The NEP 2020 emphasis on multiple pathways to learning and recognition of diverse talents reflects this theoretical understanding and to uplift the society in best possible manner.

Culturally responsive pedagogy, as articulated by Gay (2002), emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds and identities that students bring to the classroom. Gender identity represents a significant aspect of individual and cultural identity, and educational practices that acknowledge and celebrate and value gender diversity by creating more welcoming and effective learning environments for all students irrespective to their gender and any other intersectionality.

4.3 Human Rights Justification:

The human rights framework provides the most compelling justification for gender-inclusive education policies as education is a fundamental right of everyone and to promote humanity is it very important. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with subsequent international human rights instruments, establishes education as a fundamental human right that should be available to all

individuals without discrimination based on gender or other characteristics (United Nations, 1948). The Convention on the Rights of the Child further emphasizes the importance of creating educational environments that support the best interests of all children, regardless of their gender identity or expression (United Nations, 1989).

The Yogyakarta Principles, actively addresses the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. It provides specific guidance on gender-diverse individuals to education without discrimination (International Commission of Jurists, 2007). These principles emphasize the responsibility of states to ensure that educational institution to create safe and inclusive environments for all students, including those who may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming.

5. Research Methodology:

5.1 Research Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that combines qualitative content analysis with theoretical examination to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender inclusivity provisions within the NEP 2020. The research design is primarily exploratory and descriptive, aimed at examining the policy content, theoretical foundations, and potential implications of gender-inclusive measures in the new educational framework.

5.2 Data Collection Methods:

5.2.1 Primary Sources:

The primary data for this study consists of official policy documents related to the NEP 2020, including the main policy document, implementation guidelines, and supporting materials published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Additional primary sources include parliamentary debates, committee reports, and official statements related to the development and implementation of the policy.

5.2.2 Secondary Sources:

Secondary sources include academic literature on gender and education, previous educational policies in India, international comparative studies on gender-inclusive education, and reports from national and international organizations working on educational equity and gender inclusion.

5.3 Data Analysis Techniques:

5.3.1 Content Analysis:

Qualitative content analysis is employed to systematically examine the NEP 2020 document and related materials for references to gender, inclusivity, and diversity. This analysis involves identifying themes, categorizing content, and analysing the frequency and context of gender-related provisions within the policy framework.

5.3.2 Thematic Analysis:

Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns and themes related to gender inclusivity across different sections of the policy document. This approach allows for the identification of explicit and implicit sources to gender-inclusive practices and the analysis of how these themes are integrated throughout the policy framework. Which will create deep align study with respect to gender and educational status.

5.3.3 Comparative Analysis:

Comparative analysis is employed to examine the NEP 2020's gender inclusivity provisions in relation to previous educational policies in India and international best practices in gender-inclusive education. This comparative approach provides insights into the policy's innovations and potential areas for further development.

5.4 Theoretical Analysis Framework:

The theoretical analysis component of this study examines the alignment between the NEP 2020's gender inclusivity provisions and established theoretical frameworks for inclusive education. This analysis involves evaluation of how well the policy incorporates principles from social justice theory, feminist pedagogy, queer theory, and other relevant theoretical perspectives.

5.5 Ethical Considerations:

This research adheres to ethical principles of academic inquiry, including accurate representation of policy content, appropriate citation of sources, and objective analysis of policy provisions. The study recognizes the sensitivity of issues related to gender identity and aims to approach these topics with respect and understanding for the diverse experiences of individuals across the gender spectrum.

6. Analysis of Gender-Inclusive Provisions in NEP 2020:

6.1 Foundational Principles of Inclusion:

The NEP 2020 establishes gender inclusivity as a fundamental principle underlying all educational activities and institutional practices by providing more opportunistic environment to the learners and promote their well-being. The policy explicitly recognizes that "education must promoteand build character of the student, provide learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate, and caring, while at the same time them for gainful employment for better living and opportunistic environment" (Ministry of Education, 2020). This holistic approach to education inherently supports gender inclusivity by emphasizing the development of the allstudents irrespective rather than conforming to traditional gender-specific expectations.

The policy's commitment to "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education" (Ministry of Education, 2020) extends beyond access to encompass the quality of educational experiences for all learners. This comprehensive understanding of inclusion recognizes that true educational equity requires not only removing barriers ofenrolment but also creating learning environments where all

students that can succeed regardless of their gender identity or expression.

6.2 Curriculum and Pedagogical Reforms:

The NEP 2020 introduces significant curriculum reforms that support gender inclusivity through the elimination of rigid subject hierarchies and the promotion of multidisciplinary learning. The policy states that "there will be no hard separations between 'curricular' and 'extra-curricular' activities, between 'arts' and 'sciences,' between 'vocational' and 'academic' streams" (Ministry of Education, 2020). This approach directly challenges traditional gender stereotypes that have historically channelled students into gender-specific academic and career paths.

The introduction of a new curricular structure based on the 5+3+3+4 design reflects an understanding of different developmental stages and learning needs that transcends gender-based assumptions about student capabilities and interests. The policy's emphasis on experiential learning, critical thinking, and creativity creates opportunities for all students to explore their interests and develop their talents without being constrained by traditional gender role expectations.

6.3 Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment:

The NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on creating safe and supportive learning environments for all students. The policy specifically addresses the need for "safe and secure school environment" and emphasizes that "schools will be encouraged to have a peer-mentoring system" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 17). These provisions are particularly important for gender-diverse students who may face discrimination, bullying, or harassment based on their gender identity or expression.

The policy's focus on social-emotional learning and life skills development includes specific attention to empathy, respect for diversity, and understanding of different perspectives. These educational components are essential for creating school cultures that support and celebrate gender diversity while challenging discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

6.4 Teacher Education and Professional Development to promote gender quality:

Recognizing that teachers play a crucial role in implementing gender-inclusive practices, the NEP 2020 includes comprehensive provisions for teacher education reform. The policy emphasizes that "teacher preparation will include substantial practice in the art and science of teaching" and will address "knowledge of child and adolescent psychology and development" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 33). This emphasis on understanding student development includes recognition of the diverse ways that gender identity and expression may influence learning experiences.

The policy's commitment to continuous professional development for teachers includes provisions for training on inclusive practices, cultural sensitivity, and addressing diverse student needs. These professional development opportunities are essential for ensuring that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to create gender-inclusive classroom environments.

6.5 Assessment and Evaluation Reforms to NEP:

The NEP 2020 introduces significant reforms to assessment practices that support gender inclusivity by recognizing diverse forms of knowledge and ways of demonstrating learning. The policy states that assessment will be "more regular and formative, more competency-based, more comprehensive and multidimensional" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 18). This approach to assessment reduces the likelihood that traditional gender stereotypes will influence evaluation of student performance and creates opportunities for all students to demonstrate their learning in ways that align with their strengths and interests.

The introduction of portfolio-based assessment and peer evaluation provides additional opportunities for gender-inclusive assessment practices that recognize the diverse contributions and perspectives that students bring to their learning communities.

7. Implementation Strategies and Challenges:

7.1 Institutional Mechanisms for Implementation of NEP with gender inclusive approach:

The successful implementation of gender-inclusive provisions within the NEP 2020 requires robust institutional mechanisms at multiple levels of the educational system. The policy establishes the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) and other institutional bodies that will play crucial roles in supporting inclusive practices across educational institutions. These bodies are tasked with developing guidelines, providing resources, and monitoring implementation of inclusive education policies.

State-level implementation requires coordination between multiple government departments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. The NEP 2020 recognizes this complexity by emphasizing the need for collaborative approaches to policy implementation that involve all stakeholders in the educational ecosystem.

7.2 Resource Requirements and AllocationOfStrategical Resources:

Implementing gender-inclusive education requires significant investments in infrastructure, human resources, and educational materials. The NEP 2020 acknowledges these resource requirements and proposes increasing public investment in education to 6% of GDP. However, specific allocation mechanisms for supporting gender inclusivity initiatives remain to be developed through implementation processes.

The development of gender-inclusive curricula, teaching materials, and assessment tools requires specialized expertise and ongoing investment. Schools and educational institutions will need support to modify their physical environments, policies, and practices to ensure inclusivity for all gender identities.

7.3 Community Engagement and Social Change to promote egalitarian society:

The success of gender-inclusive education policies depend significantly on broader social

acceptance and community support. The NEP 2020 recognizes this challenge by emphasizing the importance of community participation in educational planning and implementation. However, changing deeply held beliefs about gender roles and identities requires sustained effort and culturally sensitive approaches.

Religious and traditional leaders, parents, and community members may require education and engagement to understand and support gender-inclusive practices in schools. The policy's emphasis on multilingual education and respect for cultural diversity provides a foundation for these community engagement efforts.

7.4 Monitoring and Evaluation Challenges to gender disparity:

Measuring the effectiveness of gender-inclusive education policies present unique challenges that extend beyond traditional educational metrics. While enrolment rates and academic achievement data provide important indicators, true gender inclusivity requires assessment of school climate, student wellbeing, and the development of inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

The development of appropriate indicators and data collection methods for monitoring gender inclusivity remains an ongoing challenge. Schools and educational systems will need training and support to collect meaningful data on the experiences of gender-diverse students and the effectiveness of inclusive practices.

8. International Comparative Analysis:

8.1 Comparative Policy Frameworks:

Examining international approaches to gender-inclusive education provides valuable insights for understanding the potential impact and implementation challenges of the NEP 2020's provisions. Countries such as Canada, Australia, and several European nations have developed comprehensive policies addressing gender diversity in education, offering models for effective implementation strategies.

The Ontario Human Rights Code in Canada, for example, provides explicit protections for gender identity and expression in educational settings, while Australian educational policies include specific provisions for supporting transgender and gender-diverse students. These international examples demonstrate the importance of clear policy language, comprehensive implementation guidelines, and ongoing support for educational institutions.

8.2 Best Practices in Implementation:

International experiences highlight several key factors that contribute to successful implementation of gender-inclusive education policies. These include strong leadership commitment, comprehensive teacher training programs, clear guidelines for schools and educators, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

The Swedish approach to gender-inclusive education, which emphasizes the elimination of

gender stereotypes from early childhood education onwards, provides insights into the long-term benefits of comprehensive gender inclusivity policies. Similarly, New Zealand's focus on creating safe and inclusive environments for all students demonstrates the importance of whole-school approaches to gender inclusivity.

8.3 Lessons for Indian Context:

While international examples provide valuable insights, the implementation of gender-inclusive education in India must account for specific cultural, social, and institutional contexts. The diversity of Indian society, including variations in language, religion, caste, and regional culture, requires flexible and adaptable approaches to gender inclusivity that respect cultural differences while promoting fundamental principles of equality and inclusion.

The NEP 2020's emphasis on multilingual education and respect for cultural diversity provides a foundation for developing culturally appropriate approaches to gender inclusivity that can be adapted to different regional and community contexts across India.

9. Recommendations and Future Directions:

9.1 Policy Enhancement Recommendations:

Based on the analysis of current provisions and international best practices, several recommendations emerge for enhancing the gender-inclusive aspects of the NEP 2020. First, the development of specific implementation guidelines that provide clear direction for schools and educators on creating gender-inclusive environments is essential. These guidelines should address practical issues such as bathroom facilities, dress codes, sports participation, and addressing discrimination or harassment.

Second, the establishment of dedicated funding mechanisms for gender inclusivity initiatives would support schools and educational institutions in implementing necessary changes to their policies, practices, and physical environments. This funding should support not only infrastructure modifications but also professional development, curriculum development, and community engagement activities.

9.2 Professional Development Priorities:

Comprehensive professional development programs for teachers, administrators, and education support staff are crucial for successful implementation of gender-inclusive practices. These programs should address both theoretical understanding of gender diversity and practical skills for creating inclusive classroom environments. Topics should include understanding gender identity and expression, recognizing and addressing bias, creating inclusive curricula, and supporting students who may face discrimination or challenges related to their gender identity.

The development of specialized training programs for guidance counselors and mental health professionals in schools is particularly important, as these individuals often serve as primary supports

for students experiencing challenges related to their gender identity or expression.

9.3 Research and Evaluation Priorities:

Ongoing research and evaluation are essential for understanding the effectiveness of gender-inclusive education policies and identifying areas for improvement. Priority research areas should include studies of student outcomes, school climate assessments, teacher preparation effectiveness, and community engagement strategies. Longitudinal studies tracking the experiences of gender-diverse students through their educational journeys would provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of inclusive policies.

The development of appropriate metrics and data collection methods for assessing gender inclusivity represents an important area for methodological research. These tools should be sensitive to the diverse experiences of gender-diverse students while providing useful information for policy makers and educators.

9.4 Stakeholder Engagement Strategies:

Successful implementation of gender-inclusive education requires engagement with multiple stakeholders, including students, families, communities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations.Developing cultural sensitive engagement strategies that respect diverse perspectives and simultaneously promoting fundamental principles of inclusion and equality represents a significant challenge that requires ongoing attention and adaptation.

Student voice and participation in policy development and implementation processes should be prioritized, particularly for gender-diverse students who may have unique insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with creating inclusive educational environments.

10. Conclusion:

The New Education Policy 2020 represents a significant advancement in India's commitment for creating more inclusive and equitable educational systems that recognize and celebrate gender diversity. Through its comprehensive approach to educational reform, the policy establishes important foundations for gender-inclusive practices while acknowledging the complex challenges associated with transforming deeply embedded educational structures and practices.

The theoretical foundations underlying the NEP 2020's approach to gender inclusivity are robust and align with contemporary understanding of gender diversity, social justice, and inclusive education practices. The policy's emphasis on holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, and the elimination of artificial hierarchies between different types of knowledge and skills creates opportunities for all students to explore their interests and develop their capabilities without being constrained by traditional gender role expectations.

However, the successful implementation of these gender-inclusive provisions will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and comprehensive support for all stakeholders in the

educational system. The challenges associated with changing institutional cultures, developing appropriate curricula and assessment practices, and engaging diverse communities in support of gender inclusivity should not be underestimated.

The international comparative analysis reveals that successful implementation of gender-inclusive education policies require clear guidelines, comprehensive professional development, adequate funding, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation system to boost the significance of education. The Indian context presents unique opportunities and challenges that will require adaptive and culturally sensitive approaches to implementation.

Moving forward, the realization of the NEP 2020's vision for gender-inclusive education will depend on the development of specific implementation strategies, the allocation of adequate resources, and the commitment of educational leaders at all levels to creating truly inclusive learning environments. The policy provides an important foundation for this work, but its ultimate success will be measured by its impact on the lived experiences of students across all gender identities and expressions.

The transformation of educational systems to embrace gender inclusivity represents not only an educational imperative but also a moral and social justice imperative that has the potential to contribute to broader social change and the creation of more equitable and inclusive societies. The NEP 2020's commitment to this transformation represents an important step forward in India's educational evolution and offers hope for creating educational environments where all students can thrive and reach their full potential.

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