



Research Article

Managerialism and the NEP 2020 Vision: Reshaping Traditional Education for a Modern India

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Abstract

This paper examines managerialism, characterised by efficiency-driven governance and technocratic control, as a transformative force in Indian educational reform under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It explores how managerialism aligns with NEP 2020's vision to restructure traditional education into a modern, inclusive, and multidisciplinary system, emphasising equity and innovation. Drawing on critical pedagogy, the study critiques managerialism's impact on teacher autonomy and student agency, revealing tensions between neoliberalism's standardised accountability and NEP 2020's holistic aspirations. By integrating perspectives from scholars like Paulo Freire and Stephen Ball, the analysis highlights how managerialism can both support and undermine equity in education. The paper proposes strategies to balance managerialism's efficiency with the culturally grounded, learner-centric goals of NEP 2020, contributing to educational scholarship and offering actionable insights for policymakers navigating Indian educational reform in a neoliberal context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India's educational landscape stands at a transformative juncture with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a landmark framework designed to dismantle traditional hierarchies and cultivate a learner-centric ecosystem that prioritises multidisciplinary learning, inclusivity, and global competitiveness (Ministry of Education, 2020). This policy envisions a radical departure from the rigid, colonial-era educational structures, advocating for holistic development, cultural rootedness, and equitable access to education. However, the implementation of NEP 2020's ambitious reforms is profoundly shaped by managerialism, an ideology characterised by the prioritisation of performance metrics, hierarchical governance, and technocratic efficiency (Ball, 2007). Managerialism, with its emphasis on standardised accountability and data-driven decision-making, offers a mechanism to streamline educational reforms but introduces significant tensions that warrant critical scrutiny.

This article argues that while managerialism facilitates structural efficiency in implementing NEP 2020, it risks undermining the policy's emancipatory potential by prioritising measurable outcomes over pedagogical creativity and equity. The integration of managerial practices, such as performance-based funding and institutional rankings, aligns with NEP 2020's goals of modernisation but often clashes with its vision of fostering autonomous, critically engaged learners and educators. Drawing on critical pedagogy, particularly the works of Paulo Freire (1970) and Stephen Ball (2007), this study illuminates the tensions between managerial control and educational equity, exploring how managerialism's neoliberal underpinnings may perpetuate inequalities unless tempered by inclusive, participatory principles (Biesta, G.2019; Deem, R. 1998). For instance, the policy's push for digital learning platforms and teacher evaluation systems reflects managerial efficiency but raises concerns about access disparities and the erosion of teacher autonomy in diverse Indian contexts.

This analysis contributes to educational scholarship by examining managerialism's dual role as both an enabler and a challenge to Indian educational reform under NEP 2020. It is structured as follows: First, it traces the historical and conceptual foundations of managerialism in education, situating it within global neoliberal trends and India's policy landscape. Second, it critically evaluates managerialism through the lens of critical pedagogy, highlighting its impact on teacher autonomy and student agency. Third, it explores contemporary applications, such as digital education and institutional autonomy, and their implications for equity. Finally, it proposes strategies to align managerialism with NEP 2020's holistic vision, offering insights for educators and policymakers navigating Indian educational reform. By addressing these dynamics, this study seeks to advance a balanced approach that harnesses managerial efficiency while safeguarding the transformative aspirations of NEP 2020.

2.0 Historical and Conceptual Foundations

The evolution of managerialism in education is deeply intertwined with global neoliberal reforms, which gained prominence in India during the late 20th century through policies emphasising accountability, efficiency, and market-driven models (Ball, 2007). Emerging from the broader socioeconomic shift toward neoliberalism in the 1980s, managerialism, characterised by hierarchical governance, performance metrics, and technocratic control, redefined educational systems worldwide, including in India. This ideology draws on James Burnham's (1941) concept of the "managerial revolution," which described the rise of a managerial class that prioritises organisational efficiency over traditional ownership or ideological goals. In the Indian context, managerialism found fertile ground in post-liberalisation education policies, such as the introduction of private institutions and public-private partnerships (PPP), which sought to modernise a system rooted in colonial-era hierarchies. These reforms, while aimed at improving access and quality, often prioritised measurable outcomes over pedagogical depth, setting the stage for the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's transformative agenda.

NEP 2020 introduces managerial practices, such as institutional autonomy, performance-based funding, and standardised assessments, to overhaul traditional educational structures that have long been constrained by bureaucratic inertia and colonial legacies (Ministry of Education, 2020). For instance, the policy's emphasis on the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) and accreditation systems reflects a managerial approach to fostering accountability and global competitiveness. These mechanisms aim to align Indian education with international benchmarks, promoting multidisciplinary learning and research innovation. However, the adoption of such practices risks perpetuating neoliberal tendencies, as institutions are incentivised to prioritise rankings and funding metrics over culturally relevant or equitable education, a tension evident in the policy's implementation across diverse Indian states.

Max Weber's (1947) concept of bureaucratic rationalisation offers a critical lens to understand how managerialism streamlines educational governance while often compromising teacher autonomy. Weber's framework highlights the reliance on rational, rule-based systems to enhance efficiency, as seen in NEP 2020's push for centralised quality assurance mechanisms like the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). While these structures aim to standardise and modernise education, they frequently reduce teachers to implementers of prescribed curricula, limiting their ability to adapt to local contexts or foster critical thinking (Freire, 1970). This bureaucratic control aligns with managerialism's technocratic ethos but clashes with NEP 2020's vision of empowering educators as facilitators of holistic learning.

The alignment of managerialism with NEP 2020 reflects a broader shift toward technocratic accountability in Indian educational reform, evident in initiatives like NIRF and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

evaluations. These tools, while promoting transparency and performance, embody managerialism's core tenets: quantification, standardisation, and hierarchical oversight. Drawing on Foucault's (1979) concept of governmentality, this shift can be seen as a form of disciplinary power that regulates educational institutions through data-driven surveillance, often at the expense of equity and inclusivity. For example, rural institutions may struggle to meet NIRF criteria due to resource constraints, exacerbating disparities in a diverse educational landscape. Thus, while managerialism supports NEP 2020's modernisation goals, its neoliberal underpinnings necessitate a critical examination to ensure alignment with the policy's commitment to equity and cultural rootedness.

3.0 Theoretical Critiques

Critical pedagogy offers a foundational critique of managerialism, portraying it as a mechanism that transforms education into a mechanistic, efficiency-driven process at the expense of human liberation. Paulo Freire (1970), in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues that managerialism reinforces a "banking model" of education, where teachers deposit standardised knowledge into passive students, thereby stifling creative and critical capacities essential for social transformation. In the context of NEP 2020, this critique manifests in the policy's emphasis on standardised assessments and performance metrics, which prioritise measurable outcomes over dialogic learning and equity (Apple, 1995). Freire's framework reveals how managerialism's neoliberal logic depoliticises education, converting holistic development into commodified skills, thus undermining NEP 2020's vision of fostering critical thinkers capable of addressing India's diverse societal challenges.

Feminist scholars further contend that managerialism perpetuates gender disparities by imposing standardised outcomes that marginalise women's voices in educational leadership and curriculum design (Blackmore, 1999). Jill Blackmore's analysis highlights how managerialism's hierarchical structures favour masculine traits of competition and quantification, sidelining relational and collaborative pedagogies often associated with feminist approaches. Under NEP 2020, initiatives like teacher performance evaluations and institutional rankings exacerbate these inequalities, as women educators, disproportionately burdened by unpaid care work, face barriers to leadership roles (Subrahmanian, 2005). This critique underscores managerialism's failure to address intersectional equity, clashing with NEP 2020's commitment to gender-inclusive education and the empowerment of marginalised groups.

From a decolonial perspective, managerialism's universalist metrics impose Western-centric standards that risk marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, which NEP 2020 explicitly seeks to integrate through multilingualism and local curricula (Santos, 2014). Boaventura de Sousa Santos critiques managerialism as a form of "epistemicide," where global ranking frameworks like NIRF privilege Eurocentric notions of excellence, devaluing epistemologies of the Global South

(Chakrabarty, 2000). In India, this manifests in the tension between NEP 2020's promotion of Indian knowledge traditions and managerialism's data-driven homogenization, potentially alienating tribal and rural communities. Decolonial theory thus calls for reimagining managerialism to accommodate pluralistic knowledge production, aligning with NEP 2020's decolonial aspirations.

Despite its touted efficiency, managerialism's overreliance on quantifiable performance indicators systematically undermines NEP 2020's holistic goals of fostering critical thinking, cultural inclusivity, and teacher autonomy. Scholars like Stephen Ball (2012) describe this as "performativity," where educators are compelled to prioritise audit cultures over substantive learning, leading to burnout and eroded professional judgment. In the Indian context, managerialism's neoliberal imperatives, evident in NEP 2020's funding tied to accreditation, widen urban-rural divides and commodify education, contradicting the policy's equity-focused ethos (Tilak, 2019). These critiques collectively urge a hybrid approach that subordinates managerialism to emancipatory principles, ensuring Indian educational reform realises NEP 2020's transformative potential.

4.0 Method

This study employs a qualitative conceptual analysis grounded in critical pedagogy, neoliberal theory, and decolonial perspectives to examine the role of managerialism in shaping the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India. Rather than collecting empirical field data, the analysis synthesises insights from scholarly literature, policy documents, and theoretical frameworks to interpret how managerialism influences educational reform processes.

4.1 Research Design

A document-based analytical research design was used. The primary sources included:

- ❖ NEP 2020 (Government of India, 2020)
- ❖ Related government policy documents (NIRF, NAAC, HECI architecture)
- ❖ Foundational theoretical texts (Freire, 1970; Weber, 1947; Foucault, 1979; Santos, 2014)
- ❖ Peer-reviewed journal articles critiquing managerialism and neoliberal education reforms (Ball, 2007; Apple, 1995; Blackmore, 1999)

This approach enabled a rigorous examination of both ideological and structural dimensions of managerialism within contemporary Indian educational reform.

4.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis was structured around three interpretive aspects:

1. **Critical Pedagogy** – to assess impacts on teacher autonomy and student agency (Freire, 1970).
2. **Neoliberalism and Managerialism** – to evaluate how performance metrics and accountability systems shape institutional behaviour (Ball, 2012; Deem, 1998).

3. **Decolonial Theory** – to examine effects on indigenous knowledge systems and equity (Santos, 2014; Chakrabarty, 2000).

The integration of these frameworks allowed for a balanced interpretation of both the efficiencies gained and the inequities produced by managerial practices embedded in NEP 2020.

4.3 Data Sources and Procedure

The study proceeded in three stages:

1. **Textual Analysis:** Policy documents were reviewed to identify managerial elements such as performance indicators, ranking systems, and institutional governance mechanisms.
2. **Thematic Coding:** Scholarly literature was coded for recurring themes—teacher autonomy, equity, digitalisation, bureaucratic control, and neoliberal performativity.
3. **Interpretive Synthesis:** The themes were integrated to assess how managerialism aligns with or contradicts NEP 2020's holistic and equitable aspirations.

This method enabled a nuanced understanding of the dual impact of managerialism: its administrative utility and its socio-pedagogical risks.

5. Results

The analysis yielded three major findings regarding the influence of managerialism on NEP 2020's implementation:

5.1 Managerialism Enhances Structural Efficiency but Reinforces Hierarchical Control

The integration of ranking systems, accreditation reforms, and standardised monitoring structures—such as NIRF and HECI—introduced greater administrative efficiency. Institutions displayed improved compliance, data transparency, and competitive performance (Sharma, 2021). However, this efficiency also reinforced hierarchical governance that constrained teacher autonomy, leading educators to prioritise administrative compliance over pedagogical creativity (Singh, 2023).

5.2 Managerialism Exacerbates Equity Gaps despite NEP 2020's Inclusivity Goals

The analysis shows that managerial reforms—particularly digital learning platforms, technology-driven assessments, and standardised teacher performance evaluations—tend to benefit well-resourced institutions. Rural, marginalised, and tribal regions face barriers in meeting these uniform performance indicators due to infrastructural inequities (Yadav & Rao, 2024). As a result, NEP 2020's equity objectives are hindered, and disparities widen across various socio-economic groups.

5.3 Managerialism Conflicts with Decolonial and Holistic Educational Philosophies

While NEP 2020 seeks to promote Indian knowledge systems, multilingualism, and culturally rooted pedagogy, managerialism emphasises global benchmarks, universal indicators, and quantifiable outcomes.

This creates epistemic tension: data-driven frameworks overshadow local pedagogical needs, and indigenous

knowledge systems risk being marginalised within technocratic structures (Santos, 2014; Gupta, 2022).

6.0 Discussion

The findings reveal that managerialism plays a paradoxical role in implementing NEP 2020. While it strengthens administrative clarity and policy execution, its neoliberal underpinnings challenge the policy's commitment to equity, teacher empowerment, and culturally responsive education.

6.1 Managerialism Must Be Balanced With Pedagogical Autonomy

The study indicates that educators experience increased monitoring and reduced freedom due to performance-based evaluations and standardised curricula. This aligns with Ball's (2012) concept of "performativity," where teachers feel pressured to demonstrate measurable outcomes rather than cultivate deep learning. For NEP 2020 to succeed, managerial structures must be redesigned to support—not control—teachers' professional judgment.

6.2 Reforms Must Address Structural Inequities Exacerbated by Managerialism

Digital learning platforms and ranked competition favour institutions with technological infrastructure, trained staff, and financial resources. This disadvantages rural and marginalised communities, contradicting NEP 2020's equity-focused vision (Srivastava, 2016). A differentiated, context-sensitive approach is needed to ensure institutional autonomy does not translate into institutional inequality.

6.3 Decolonial Priorities Require Reframing Metrics of Success

Current managerial indicators prioritise global rankings and compliance measures rooted in Western educational models. These systems risk sidelining local knowledge traditions and linguistic diversity (Chakrabarty, 2000).

A revised metric framework should recognise:

- ❖ Indigenous epistemologies
- ❖ Community knowledge
- ❖ Local learning outcomes
- ❖ Contextualised cultural competencies

Such reframing will align managerial implementation with NEP 2020's decolonial aspirations.

6.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

This study suggests three major policy directions:

1. Reform evaluation systems to value teacher autonomy and contextualised pedagogy.
2. Increase resource support to institutions in rural and marginalised areas to reduce digital and infrastructural inequities.
3. Redesign performance indicators to integrate qualitative, community-based, and culturally relevant measures.

7. Contemporary Applications and Implications

In the digital era, managerialism manifests in NEP 2020's push for data-driven e-learning platforms, such as the DIKSHA portal, which streamline educational delivery but exacerbate access inequities in rural and marginalised communities (Yadav & Rao, 2024). These neoliberal tools, while aligning with NEP

2020's modernisation goals, often prioritise efficiency over inclusive access, undermining equity for under-resourced schools. Teacher training programs under NEP 2020, such as the National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA), adopt managerial approaches to standardise professional development, yet risk enforcing compliance over pedagogical innovation (Singh, 2023). This emphasis on measurable outcomes can limit teacher autonomy, clashing with the policy's vision of creative education. Resistance to managerialism emerges through teacher movements advocating for autonomy, aligning with NEP 2020's call for participatory school governance (Nambissan & Ball, 2010). To realise NEP 2020's transformative vision, educational leaders must balance managerial efficiency with democratic practices that empower teachers and students, ensuring Indian educational reform prioritises equity and innovation (Pathak, 2013).

8. CONCLUSION

This article underscores that managerialism, while instrumental in implementing NEP 2020's structural reforms, requires critical scrutiny to preserve education's emancipatory potential. By fostering dialogue between managerial strategies and critical pedagogy, India can build an educational system that harmonises efficiency with equity, aligning with NEP 2020's holistic aspirations (Freire, 1970). Future research should explore how NEP 2020 can mitigate managerialism's neoliberal excesses, promoting inclusive and innovative practices that empower diverse learners and educators in the context of Indian educational reform.

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