



Implementation Of New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 In India: Some Issues And Challenges In The Perspective Of Higher Education System

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ABSTRACT

Indian higher education has long been hindered by excessive regulation. This regulation has been in the form of stringent curricular and organisational rules. Therefore the presence of private universities is almost negligible. Moreover, the existing set up of higher education in India is further marked by cramming, high-stake exams, early specialisation etc. The NEP-2020 has a quality of an overall transformation of the present higher education system. This reform brings the much needed hope in Indian higher education. After seventy-five years of independence, India is finally moving beyond the legacy of colonial rule and the subsequent regulatory constraints. Actually, the NEP-2020 is theoretically based on the National Policy on Education framed in 1986 which was amended in 1992. The NEP-2020 is a fundamental overhaul of the education system rather than incremental recommendations. The NEP-2020 is more inclusive. It would accommodate a larger number of students coming from diverse communities of India. The principal beneficiaries of this expansion is the youth population. At organisational level the NEP-2020 will push for institutional flexibility, deregulation, liberal education, and last but not the least an increased autonomy. As we shall see in the course of this research paper, opinions on the policy are mixed; some see it as a beneficial overhaul, while others believe it merely formalises practices already in place. For NEP-2020 to effect significant change and overcome the various challenges obstructing its implementation, there must be substantial academic, logistical and economic support from all segments of the society. The present research paper highlights some issues and challenges in the implementation of NEP-2020, in the larger perspective of the Indian higher education system.

Keywords: Education System, NEP-2020, Higher Education, Technology, Transformation, Deregulation.

Introduction: India adopted its first National Education Policy (NEP) in 1968, which aimed to centralise and standardise the country's educational structure. This policy introduced several higher education concepts, including 'standard setting,' 'accreditation,' and 'credit rating,' all monitored by the University Grants Commission (UGC). As the primary funding body, the UGC oversaw various educational branches, particularly in general education, science, social sciences, and languages. Empowered by Entry 66 of the Union List under the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the UGC used its funding strategies to enforce standards and promote equity through reservations in higher education. This centralised control resulted in institutions losing some autonomy and the capacity for experimental approaches. The current NEP, introduced in 2020, is the third iteration of the policy. It establishes guiding principles for the entire education system while allowing

some flexibility. Although it centralises regulatory power to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency, the policy emphasises that its implementation should be rooted in Indian experiences. The NEP-2020 highlights the critical role of teachers in educational reforms. It also outlines several fundamental principles including respect for diversity and local context in curricula, promotion of multilingualism and the importance of language in teaching and research, adherence to ethics and constitutional values such as democratic spirit, pluralism, equality, and justice, and emphasis on autonomy, good governance, and empowerment within the regulatory system. Moreover, the policy acknowledges that education is a concurrent subject, requiring collaboration between different levels of government.

Higher Education System in India: Mugging up, frequent examinations leading to stress and pressure on students and premature specialisation have been some of the key reasons along with rigorous curriculum which prevented the due reform in the Indian Higher Education system. Students had to choose their preferred subjects as early as ninth class, which finally ended with an all or nothing stake board examination. These examinations were conducted by multiple examination boards all over the country. After that came another round of examinations for law, medicine, engineering and other fields. The marks obtained in all of these examinations would be the criteria for any further jobs. These marks, once obtained, would follow the students throughout their academic journey, which made it impossible to switch to other streams and subjects later on. With the implementation of the NEP-2020, these restrictions can no longer force students to continue in a subject which they later cannot change. Students have more choices and mobility now in electing the subjects and streams.

Not surprisingly, those who created and implemented the old system do not welcome the changes introduced by the NEP. These changes were necessitated by several factors, keeping in mind those reasons the new policies were made and implemented. **Firstly**, India's average gross enrollment ratio in higher education remained only 28.4 percent in recent years when compared to China's 59.6 percent, despite both countries starting with low single-digit rates after World War II. **Secondly**, countries like Japan, China, America & England have the larger part of their population ageing and old whereas India boasts a young population, with half under the age of thirty. This demographic advantage, often referred to as a "youth dividend," highlighted the necessity of expanding the higher education system rapidly by allowing the establishment of autonomous private universities. **Thirdly**, the significant number of Indians studying abroad—spending billions in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia—prompted a push to develop quality domestic universities that follow international best practices. **Lastly**, there has been a renewed appreciation for India's historical role as a centre of education and thought, exemplified by ancient institutions like Nalanda, which attracted scholars from across Asia. This historical pride has fueled a desire to recreate such centres of learning in modern India. The destruction of Nalanda along with other institutions has not been forgotten. This memory of a world renowned centre of learning is a source of resentment and at the same time motivation to reaffirm Indian prominence in the field of education.

The availability of a skilled workforce in comparison to an ever evolving job market is inadequate and is a source of concern for the Industry leaders. Traditionally, engineering has provided an adequate supply of skilled workers to the market but in the present its inability to continue doing what it has been doing is extremely worrisome. Software industry leaders, in particular, have lamented the absence of basic mental skills among graduates, despite their qualifications. Universities like Ashoka and Shiv Nadar which embody liberal education gained acceptance very slowly. Their courses are a respite from the old education system. Moreover, they have proved that liberal education is the only strategy to tackle the problem of inadequate workforce and also to realise the potential of young India. The liberal education offered in these private universities fosters and nurtures innovative minds. Earlier getting education was equivalent to getting a job. It was incomprehensible if someone replied that she is studying to be a critical thinker. But now, 'interdisciplinary', 'thinking' and 'critical thinking' are not foreign phrases. Also these phrases clashed with the traditional and hierarchical way of thinking which valued and preferred practical-vocational subjects over wider useless intellectual pursuits. These concepts, once viewed as indulgent luxuries of the affluent West, are now recognized for their role in advancing cognitive development.

Key Provisions of NEP-2020: The NEP-2020's range is a precise indicator of its diversity and wider domain. It begins from elementary school education and covers intensive research oriented topics. Certain elements of the NEP are poised to significantly transform higher education in India. Under the NEP, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been categorised as either research-intensive universities, which also engage in teaching, or teaching-intensive universities, which also conduct some research. This distinction aims to allow certain HEIs to develop robust research infrastructures and carry out cutting-edge and socially relevant research. As universities compete healthily across the nation with a research focus, the potential for some to achieve world-class status increases.

- **A Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach:** To promote holistic and multidisciplinary learning in Indian higher education, the NEP suggests to integrate the Humanities and Arts with Science, Technology,

Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in undergraduate(UG) courses. It also suggests that a comprehensive approach should be adopted to enhance creativity, innovation, analytical thinking, deep level thinking ability, solution oriented to create teamwork feeling and conversation skills because these all traits are essential for deep learning and overall awareness based on social norms. Historically, we have prioritised research and knowledge based education across various disciplines from the Arts and Humanities to Science and Technology. The NEP-2020 carries forward the tradition and is in the process of establishing India as the global educational hub. The new universities have research and innovation at the centre of their agenda. National Research Foundation (NRF) is one such proposal in the NEP-2020 to cultivate and produce cutting edge research across all the disciplines. Given India's vast pool of young talent, it is regarded as crucial to develop a robust research ecosystem in universities to capitalise on this demographic advantage.

- **Research-Based Education:** The NRF aims at promoting a diffusive research culture in universities. It ensures the financial resources for the research work, allocating a merit-based and transparent peer review process. Furthermore, recognizing significant research initiatives in collaboration with government, industry, and philanthropic organisations, makes the higher education system more effective. The funding bodies such as the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Indian Council of Medical Research, Indian Council of Historical Research, and University Grants Commission are functional and it is hoped that these funding agencies will surely make the whole higher education system more vibrant. Moreover, the NRF aims to channelise these bodies into diverse fields at once.

- **Digital Learning:** In terms of online and digital education, the policy establishes a National Educational Technology Forum to promote digital learning. This forum will coordinate efforts related to digital tools, educational materials, and capacity building including technologies for study, assessment and teacher training. To ensure quality education through alternative means, the Ministry of Education will focus on developing dedicated digital infrastructure, content, and capacity building for e-education in both school and higher education sectors. Study materials will also be made available in regional languages to facilitate learning. Technology will be utilised to enhance the teaching-learning experience in physical classrooms and provide access to online education for those unable to attend HEIs. HEIs will now be able to offer degree programs through online teaching platforms and tools that enable interactive online classes.

- **Ensuring Greater Access to Higher Education:** Under the NEP 2020, there is a planned increase in the gross enrollment ratio for higher education from 26.3 percent in 2018 to 50 percent, accompanied by the addition of 3.5 crore new seats in higher educational institutions. The gross enrollment ratio signifies the proportion of eligible individuals at a specific educational level who are enrolled in educational institutions. For instance, if there are 100 students eligible for higher education and 60 are enrolled, the ratio would be 60 percent.

- **Higher Education Commission of India:** The new policy points out that the Higher Education Commission of India is a supervisor body. Its role is to oversee all types of higher education, except medical and legal education, replacing current regulatory bodies such as UGC, AICTE, and NCTE. This commission will facilitate the establishment of multidisciplinary education and research universities similar to IITs and IIMs, aimed at achieving international standards. Admission to these institutions will be conducted through a common entrance test administered by the National Testing Agency, with no mandatory subjects and inclusion of Arts and Humanities in technical institutions, eliminating the traditional distinctions between Arts, Science, and Commerce. All institutions, including IITs, will adopt a comprehensive approach. The Higher Education Commission will consist of four key bodies: National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), General Education Council (GEC), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC).

- **Multiple Entry and Exit:** The NEP-2020 introduces several reforms aimed at transforming the education landscape in India. It includes provisions for multiple entry and exit options in undergraduate programs, allowing students to leave courses at different stages and receive corresponding certificates or degrees such as certificate after one year education, Advanced Diploma after two years, graduate degree after three years and Graduate Certificate with research after four years' education. The policy eliminates the M.Phil. program and establishes an Academic Bank of Credit to digitally store all students' earned credits.

- **Preservation of Linguistic Diversity:** Regarding advanced education, the policy aims to achieve a hundred percent youth and adult literacy rate by 2030. It emphasises on the preservation of linguistic diversity by recommending the study of native or regional language up to class fifth and class eighth, with the option to study foreign languages starting from the 9th grade. The policy also mandates the study of selecting at least two Indian languages under the tri-language formula, with preferences based on state, region, and student choice. Traditional languages such as Sanskrit will also be offered as optional subjects.

- **Ensuring Inclusivity in Education:** In the NEP-2020, physical education will be integrated into the curriculum from the primary level onwards, aiming to develop skills in horticulture, yoga, music, dance, sports, and sculpture among students. Recommendations for the educational system include performance-based promotions for teachers and the establishment of professional standards by the National Council for Teacher Education by 2022. The policy advocates for the development of national-level course content for teacher education and proposes a mandatory four-year B.Ed. degree for teaching by 2030. Provisions for differently-abled children involve curriculum adaptations from the foundational stage to higher education, ensuring their full participation in the educational process.
- **Funding and Investment:** In terms of funding, the policy proposes increasing investment in the education sector to 6 percent of GDP, up from the current 4.43 percent. Financial aid initiatives will focus on supporting students from SC, ST, OBC, and other specific categories, with plans to expand the National Scholarship Portal for better monitoring and support of their progress.

Some Issues Related to NEP-2020: Overall, the NEP-2020 envisions an overall transformation of the existing higher education system in India aiming to enhance accessibility, quality, and inclusivity across all levels of education. However, notwithstanding its transformative vision, certain issues remain unresolved and may pose an obstruction in the effective implementation of the NEP-2020. The fact is that the issue of education comes in the Concurrent List which enables most of the states to frame their own education system. Therefore, it is essential for State Governments to take proactive steps for the effective implementation of this decision. However, some states may oppose the establishment of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council as the primary governing body, citing concerns over centralization.

‘Cost of education’ is a significant concern under the new policy, particularly regarding access to foreign universities. Many educators fear that pursuing education abroad could be financially prohibitive for students from lower-income backgrounds, posing a challenge to equitable access to higher education.

Moreover, some concerns have been raised in South Indian states about the perceived **‘Sanskritisation of education’** through the tri-language formula. Implementing education in the mother tongue or regional language can present practical challenges in diverse regions like union territories such as Delhi, where students speak various languages. This diversity raises questions about the feasibility of introducing vernacular education alongside English-medium schools, especially at the primary level.

Today issues regarding **‘inadequate scrutiny of fees’** in some states, despite existing regulations aimed at preventing excessive profiteering through unrestricted donations. Securing adequate funding remains critical, as it hinges on the government's commitment to allocate a fund of 6 percent of GDP for the betterment of our education system. **‘The shortage of well-trained teachers’** at the primary level poses a very significant obstacle to implementing the NEP 2020 effectively. Addressing this shortage will be crucial for the policy's success in elementary education reform.

Therefore, the effective implementation of the NEP largely depends on the commitment of stakeholders. It will be necessary for both students and teachers to align with the NEP's vision, and HEIs will be ready to proactively implement many of its measures without requiring government intervention.

Challenges of NEP-2020: India currently ranks 62nd globally in public expenditure per student, with a number of underperforming educational institutions. While countries like the US and China lead in this regard, smaller nations such as Bhutan, Korea, and Kenya also outperform India. The Kothari Commission in 1964 recommended allocating 6 percent of GDP to education, a benchmark that remains unmet. Looking ahead to achieving a 50 percent enrollment target in higher education by 2035 as per the new education policy, India faces challenges given the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence and other technological applications.

There is a growing perception that **‘traditional structures of education’** may become obsolete, with a shift towards specialised and application-driven education. This transformation is driven by the dynamic demands of modern business applications across industries, necessitating a more agile educational approach that integrates technical education seamlessly. Internationally, India is often viewed as a market for specialised tasks, despite internal aspirations to produce global specialists. The looming challenge lies in **‘preparing specialists’** who can effectively compete with AI and emerging technologies, a task hindered by insufficient capital investment in education. Another critical challenge is the **‘disparity between government and private educational institutions in funding and performance.’** Central government-funded institutions are typically perceived as centres of excellence, while state-funded and private institutions often struggle due to governance issues and profit-driven motives.

To address these challenges, the focus must shift towards **'enhancing governance'** in educational institutions rather than merely restructuring the system. Effective governance can propel educational reforms forward, ensuring alignment with national goals and fostering educational excellence.

The new education policy's adoption of a 5+3+3+4 teaching structure supports interdisciplinary learning, facilitating multiple entry and exit points for students across various educational streams. However, challenges persist in **'ensuring equitable access to education'** in regional languages, especially given the predominance of English-language materials and the limitations of translation software. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online learning, highlighting disparities in access to content in regional languages like Hindi. Despite **'technological advancements'** in translation, nuances often get lost, posing a barrier to effective learning. Teacher recruitment and training remain pivotal, necessitating a shift towards innovative, multi-modal teaching methods that cater to evolving educational needs. Current educational practices often treat teachers as mere deliverers of content, underscoring the need for their professional development and adequate remuneration.

Moreover, the entry of foreign educational institutions under the new policy presents both opportunities and challenges. While it aims to enhance educational diversity and quality, it also risks overshadowing existing institutions and necessitates alignment with global educational standards. Overall, achieving the policy's vision hinges on substantial public expenditure, necessitating collaborative efforts between the union and state governments to secure adequate funding and policy support for India's educational future.

Concluding Remarks: Thus, the NEP-2020 presents an admirable vision, yet its effectiveness hinges on its integration with other governmental initiatives like Digital India, Skill India, and the New Industrial Policy. Coherent structural transformation can be achieved through strategic policy linkages. Learning from Skill India's engagement with the business sector to shape vocational education curricula is crucial for success. Moreover, here it is a need of hour to put pressure for the betterment of the present higher education system. Likewise India needs an evidence-based decision-making process to bring drastic and rapid changes to face the problem of global challenges. Actually, the NEP-2020 includes some basic provisions for effective and time bound evaluation systems by a consultative monitoring system, to empower the continuous educational reforms in India. This approach marks a departure from the expectation of a new education policy every decade solely to change curricula, which itself represents a significant achievement. To conclude, we can point out that the NEP-2020 is pivotal for higher education but the true impact of the policy will depend on effective and timely implementation.

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