



A CRITICAL STUDY OF NEP 2020: ISSUES, APPROACHES, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CRITICISM

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Abstract: Well defined and futuristic education policy is essential for a country at school and college levels due to the reason that education leads to economic and social progress. Different countries adopt different education systems by considering the tradition and culture and adopt different stages during their life cycle at school and college education levels to make it effective. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system. The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986. The policy is a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher education as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India. The policy aims to transform India's education system by 2021.

Shortly after the release of the policy, the government clarified that no one will be forced to study any particular language and that the medium of instruction will not be shifted from English to any regional language.^[3] The language policy in NEP is a broad guideline and advisory in nature; and it is up to the states, institutions, and schools to decide on the implementation. Education in India is a Concurrent List subject.

Himachal Pradesh has become the first state to implement New Education Policy 2020. The national educational policy should be implemented in all schools over India by 2022.

Keywords: Higher Education, National Education Policy 2020, NEP-2020, Overview & Analysis, Implementation Strategies, Approaches, Challenges, Opportunities of NEP 2020.

Background: The NEP 2020 replaces the National Policy on Education of 1986. In January 2015, a committee under former Cabinet Secretary T. S. R. Subramanian started the consultation process for the New Education Policy. Based on the committee report, in June 2017, the draft NEP was submitted in 2019 by a panel led by former Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) chief Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan. The Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) 2019 was later released by Ministry of Human Resource Development, followed by a number of public consultations. T74 Draft NEP was 484 pages. The Ministry undertook a rigorous consultation process in formulating the draft policy: "Over two lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), 676 districts were received."

Introduction

India, being a growing liberal country for educational reforms, currently has about 845 universities and approximately 40,000 higher education institutions (HIEs), reflecting the overall high fragmentation and many small sized HEIs in the country which are affiliated to these universities. It is found that over 40% of these small sized institutions are running single program me against the expected reform to a multidisciplinary style of higher education which is an essential requirement for the educational reforms in the country for the 21st century. It is also noted that over 20% of the colleges have annual enrolment less than 100 students making them nonviable to improve the quality of education and only 4% of colleges enroll more than 3,000 students annually due to regional imbalance as well as the quality of education they offer. Some of the reasons found for the fragmentation of the higher education (HE) system in India are:

It is predicted that India will be the third largest economy in the world by 2030-2032 with estimated GDP of ten trillion dollars. It is evident that the ten trillion economies will be driven by knowledge resources and not by the natural resources of the country. To boost the growth of the Indian education sector, the present government decided to revamp it by introducing a comprehensive National Education Policy 2020. This is in line with the Prime Minister's recent call on leveraging the Fourth Industrial Revolution to take India to new heights. The currently introduced National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India centered education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all.





Issues of NEP 2020

- Early streaming of students into different disciplines.
- Lack of access to HE, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged areas which resulted in the current gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 25% only.
- Lack of teacher and institutional autonomy to make innovations in HE to attract many students.
- Insufficient mechanisms for career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders.
- The lack of research and innovations at most of the universities and colleges.
- Suboptimal levels of governance and leadership at higher education institutions.
- A corrupted regulatory system allowing fake colleges to thrive while constraining excellent, innovative institutions.

Approaches of NEP 2020

1. Curriculum and Content

The NEP seeks to introduce a shift from 10+2 structure to 5+3+3+4 structure, where early childhood education will be a part of formal education. In addition, the NEP 2020 focuses on reducing the curriculum content to make space for critical thinking and in turn, develop individuals with 21st-century skills instilled in them. Hence, all aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy need to be restructured to attain these goals.

The challenges in successfully implementing these changes include modifying the curriculum in accordance with the National Curriculum Framework. Also, educators need to rethink the learning content rubric and modify the textbooks accordingly.

2. Teacher Availability and Training

The policy envisages the redesign of the school curriculum. However, in order to deliver the curriculum effectively, schools and concerned authorities need to train teachers and understand the pedagogical needs to make a smooth transition to the new education system. Furthermore, they need to shift the focus from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning to foster collaborative skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving and decision-making abilities in the youth.

A study suggests that over 250 million students are estimated to enroll in K-12 schools in India by 2030. This means that we need nearly 7 million more teachers to handle this burgeoning student population.

Since teaching is one of the low-paid professions in India, experiential learning and concept-oriented teaching will be a challenging task. Until the teacher remuneration is revised, the implementation of the NEP 2020 will be quite challenging.

3. Technology

The NEP 2020 lays emphasis on leveraging the advantage of technology in making the youth future-ready. But, developing digital infrastructure such as digital classrooms, remote expertise-driven teaching models, AR/VR tools to bridge gaps in physical teaching and laboratory infrastructure is a great challenge because the majority of the schools don't have a proper set-up to support these tools. Also, the cost associated with building digital infrastructure might not be affordable for all schools across the country.

Moreover, in rural areas of the country where the Internet connectivity is nearly absent, deploying digital learning tools is out of the question. Hence, the government should work on improving the basic infrastructure that will support the digital infrastructure in all areas.

4. Examination Structure

The NEP focuses on formative assessment for learning rather than summative assessment. The primary purpose of changing the assessment system is to promote continuous tracking of learning outcomes. However, continuous assessment requires schools and teachers to use innovative evaluation approaches and assignments. These approaches demand technological intervention and active involvement of teachers and students.

According to a study, out of the 1.5 million schools in India, 75 per cent are run by the government. Of the remaining 400,000 private schools, nearly 80 per cent schools are 'budget private schools. Hence, deploying a continuous assessment framework is a challenging task in these schools.



Challenges of NEP 2020

1. Opening universities every week is a herculean task

India today has around 1,000 universities across the country. Doubling the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education by 2035 which is one of the stated goals of the policy will mean that **we must open one new university every week, for the next 15 years.**

Opening one University every week on an ongoing basis is an undoubtedly massive challenge.

2. The numbers are no less daunting in reforms to our school system

The National Education Policy 2020 intends to bring 2 crore children who are currently not in schools, back into the school system. Whichever way you look at it, accomplishing this over 15 years requires the setting up of around 50 schools every week.

3. Funding is a big challenge in the Covid era

From a funding standpoint, this is not a challenge for the faint-hearted. The National Education Policy 2020 envisages an increase in education spending from 4.6% to 6% of GDP, which amounts to around INR 2.5 lakh crores per year.

This money will be well-spent building schools and colleges across the country, appointing teachers and professors, and for operational expenses such as providing free breakfast to school children.

What makes things tricky is that **this policy comes into being at a time when the economy has been battered by Covid-19 related lockdowns, government tax collections are abysmally low, and the fiscal deficit was high even pre-Covid.**

4. Current focus on healthcare and economic recovery to lower the execution speed

Economists have been calling for large stimulus packages amounting to double-digit percentages of GDP, despite the strain on the exchequer.

5. Need to create a large pool of trained teachers

In school education, the policy envisages a sweeping structural re-design of the curriculum a very welcome step.

But in order to deliver this curriculum effectively, we need teachers who are trained in and understand the pedagogical needs.

Many of the curricular changes require substantial mindset shifts on the part of teachers, as well as parents.

6. Inter-disciplinary higher education demands for a cultural shift

In higher education, the National Education Policy 2020's focus on inter-disciplinary learning is a very welcome step. Universities, especially in India, have for decades been very silo-ed and departmentalized.

The National Education policy 2020 has many initiatives to improve the quality and the broadness of the education system in India. The objectives of this study on National Education Policy 2020 are:

- (1) To highlights and overview the policies of the newly accepted higher education system (NEP 2020).
- (2) To compare National Education Policy 2020 with the currently adopted policy in India.
- (3) To identify the innovations in new national higher education policy 2020.
- (4) To predict the implications of NEP 2020 on the Indian higher education system.
- (5) To discuss the merits of Higher Education Policies of NEP 2020.
- (6) Suggestions for further improvements for the effective implementation of NEP 2020 to realize its goal.

Targets & Timelines

Here are the policy's key targets as well as the deadlines set for some:

- The entire policy will be implemented by 2040.
- 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio from Pre-School to Secondary level by 2030.
- Teachers to be prepared for assessment reforms by 2030.
- Common standards of learning in public and private schools.
- Mission to focus on foundational numeracy and literacy of all students by Grade 3.
- Universalizing early childhood care and education by 2030.
- Vocational training for at least 50% learners by 2025.

Opportunities of NEP 2020

New education Policy begins with the unfinished agenda of NEP — 1986. NEP — 1986 was rooted in a very different India. Over the years, remarkable strides have been made in terms of access and equity. Near universal levels of enrolment at primary levels, and subsequent increase in enrolment at higher education levels (GER: 26.3%) have been achieved. However, there has also been a drop in the quality of learning in public school systems, followed by an exodus of elite and middle classes. This also led to the weakening of accountability mechanisms. Despite poor returns on learning, the pay-structures in public systems have seen a gradual increase.



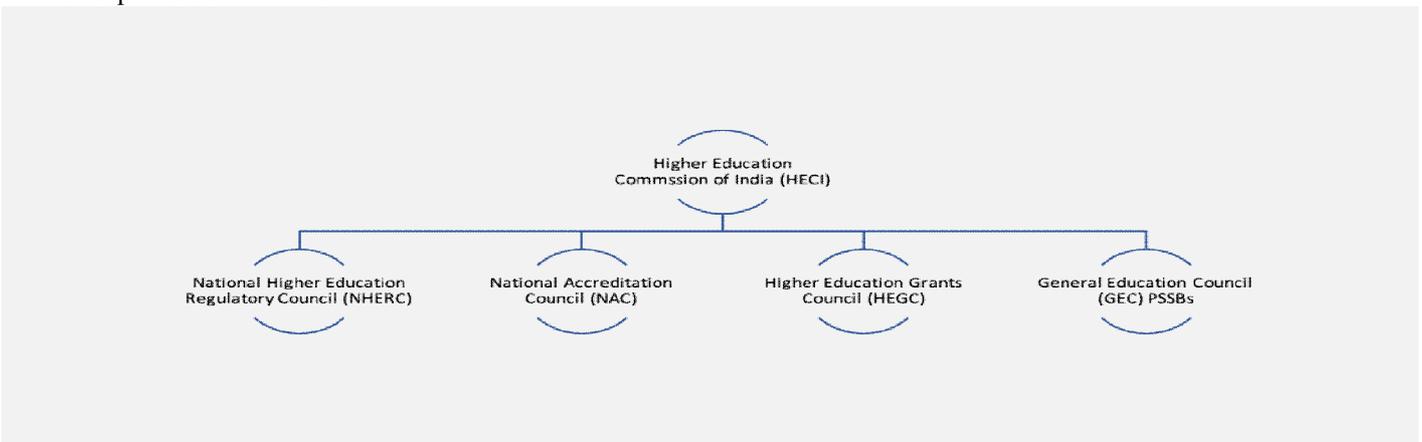
1. School Education

- Revamping of 10+2 structure to 5+3+3+4. New pedagogical and curricular structure to include pre-primary years. It's a good departure as this was ignored in education policy documents, and referred to in informal sense.
- NCERT will focus on the development of new curricular and pedagogical structure for ECCE. Policy also delves deep into the development and training of Anganwadi trainers through short-term and long-term programs. A positive thrust towards formalisation of ECCE structure and delivery.
- Focus on attaining foundational numeracy and literacy by grade 3. Ministry of Education (MoE) will strengthen this, and run it in a mission mode through a separate national mission.
- A separate national book policy to develop libraries around the country and instil love of reading in children. Public libraries in India are scarce. If this could be strengthened through the public education policy, it's a plus.
- Mid-day meals to see an upgradation in nutrition component, wherever possible, local alternatives to be provided. Eggs are still a contentious policy issue, policy plays it safe by steering clear to avoid any unnecessary controversy.
- Design of programs and interventions to alleviate issue of dropouts in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Medium of instruction section for some reason has received lot of undue attention. However, the section remains fairly flexible to avoid all sort of controversy. Half-baked understanding and market push towards English and paternal perception of 'quality' could've led to this flexibility. Policy also doesn't thrust/force/prefer any particular language over the other and encourages learning multiple languages. It also recommends teaching foreign languages at secondary level: Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian.
- Policy inserts a new term called SEDGs (socio-economically disadvantaged groups). This hitherto hasn't been used as a social category in technical documents. Though later sections highlight categories as caste, tribe, disability, transgenders and have passing references to term minority. Technical criticism aside, policy envisages ample initiatives to be targeted at these groups to increase enrolment and retention.
- PARAKH, a new body to focus on assessments as NAS (National Achievement Survey) and SAS (State Achievement Survey). PARAKH could be an important instrument to look at learning gaps and support targeting of various ministry goals and programs.

2. Higher Education

It's important to view the policy in context of what has been happening in public universities, and recent debacle of universities of eminence. There has been continuous erosion of university autonomy by the state. Perverse state violence unleashed upon one of the best public universities in India didn't happen in some distant past. Political appointments of university leaders who are at best the instruments of state, as opposed to being focused on teaching, learning, research or administration. Though the document highlights regulatory autonomy, it would be worrisome if the document also meant financial autonomy.

- This 'imagined' autonomy is envisaged through replacement of UGC (University Grants Commission) and AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education). New body Higher Education Commission of India is based on the idea of division of functions and separation of activities.



- Policy also argues against commercialization of education. However, in the same breadth allows for foreign universities to come to India. There has been significant increase in number of private universities by Indian providers. If the idea was to increase competition, it makes sense. However, insertion of the statement doesn't.
- Focus on futuristic curriculum makes sense, and a separate body dedicated to focus on integrating technology in institutions is a necessary direction.



- National Research Foundation is another great idea. However, if these spaces get filled by individuals who are driven by ideological agendas, little could be expected.
- Indian Universities will be allowed to set up campuses elsewhere in the world — there is a strong potential for this to develop in gulf -markets. There is a huge demand for quality education by Indian diaspora.

Criticism of NEP 2020

Here is a list of criticisms which have been leveled, or which may be leveled, against the NEP 2020

- The NEP circumvented parliamentary oversight, discussion and scrutiny. Given it has been brought at the time when parliament is not functioning due to COVID-19, this is a rather hasty approach, one which seems to be aimed at scoring a political point. This is also not the first time this has happened. Members of Parliament have been repeatedly kept out of crucial discussions in the past 6 years, preventing them from examining policies critically or otherwise expressing their views and suggesting amendments.

- The policy is a vision document that fails to be inclusive of the bottom-most strata of society and provides little to no relief to the poor, women and caste and religious minorities, as it glosses over key concerns of access to education which have long prevailed. There is no comprehensive roadmap and coherent implementation strategy in place to execute this grand vision.

- Many milestones and a commitment to finances necessary to execute this plan aren't clearly defined. Take, for example, the line: "The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in the Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest." There is no clear commitment that can hold the government accountable.

- Three Language formula: Though the policy does not compel this provision, it is crafted in a manner that leaves little choice and flexibility with the students/teachers/schools. It is also in direct contravention with a Supreme Court Judgment. The way this is laid out is bound to bring to mind the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, against the central government's intention to make Hindi an official language. Political parties in the South see this as a move by the Modi government to impose Hindi in non-Hindi speaking states. This is, of course, despite the fact that the centre has clarified that it will not impose any language on any state and the final decision on this will be left to the state itself.

- The NEP 2020 is silent on the RTE Act and universalisation of education will not be achieved without legal backing: There is no mechanism to link primary and secondary education with the RTE. This is not binding on the centre/state legally. As the RTE forum said, in a statement: "The final policy talks about the universalisation of school education from 3-18 years, without making it a legal right. Hence there is no mandatory mechanism for the union and state governments to make it a reality. Without the RTE Act, universalisation will be very difficult."

Conclusion

Higher education is an important aspect in deciding the economy, social status, technology adoption, and healthy human behaviour in every country. Improving GER to include every citizen of the country in higher education offerings is the responsibility of the education department of the country government. National Education Policy of India 2020 is marching towards achieving such objective by making innovative policies to improve the quality, attractiveness, affordability, and increasing the supply by opening up the higher education for the private sector and at the same time with strict controls to maintain quality in every higher education institution. By encouraging merit-based admissions with free-ships& scholarships, merit & research based continuous performers as faculty members, and merit based proven leaders in regulating bodies, and strict monitoring of quality through biennial accreditation based on self-declaration of progress through technology-based monitoring, NEP-2020 is expected to fulfill its objectives by 2030.

All higher education institutions with current nomenclature of affiliated colleges will expand as multi-disciplinary autonomous colleges with degree giving power in their name or becomes constituent colleges of their affiliated universities. An impartial agency National Research Foundation will fund for innovative projects in priority research areas of basic sciences, applied sciences, and social sciences & humanities. HE system will transform itself as student centric with the freedom to choose core and allied subjects within a discipline and across disciplines. Faculty members also get autonomy to choose curriculum, methodology, pedagogy and evaluation models within the given policy framework. These transformations will start from the academic year 2021-22 and will continue until the year 2030 where the first level of transformation is expected too visible.



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