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## AFFLICTIONS INHERENT WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION IN UP HEIS AND NEP'S RESPONSE: A REDRESSAL

**Sangeeta Kumar**

Sri Tika Ram Kanya Mahavidyalaya  
Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

### Introduction

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher, and statesman stated “to help the students to earn a living is one of the functions of education. However, he further said “Education, according to Indian tradition, is not merely a means of earning a living, it is initiation into the life of spirit, a training of human soul in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue. All education is a search for truth and pursuit of social betterment.” Radhakrishnan said, “A university is a seat of learning, not a centre of worship. It believes in the pursuit of knowledge and not in the establishment of cult. As university men, it is our privilege and honour to seek for truth and in this pursuit, we should not be deterred by the fear of what we might find.” [1]

Somewhere we lost out on these objectives of education, so much so that not even employment remains an objective in the current system of education. Higher education ideally is required to impart a capacity for deep understanding in students, rather than being served superficial knowledge. Global competition in all fields demands students' skills and mental capacity. So, in order to bring Indian education at par with the international level, there is an urgent need to integrate educational policies with socio economic policies. [2] For this integration to take place, first and foremost, teachers must be made adept in use of technology and teaching techniques. The competencies of teachers at every level of education is non-negotiable, whether primary, secondary, Higher secondary or Higher Education. There is a need for proper funding for libraries, playgrounds, and its equipment, laboratories, and their upgradation on a regular basis.

The Higher education system in state universities, especially Uttar Pradesh has been churning out undergraduates and post graduates who are unemployable anywhere. The present state of Higher Education frustrates our youth today because it fails to prepare a majority of them to be competitively employable and fails to excite their young minds. Consequently, their creative energies do not get effectively channelized toward nation building.

Many state universities provide affiliation to large numbers of colleges scattered around the geographical area of the given university. These colleges have a wide range of infrastructure facilities, ranging from very poor to tolerable, but they are bound by the common academic and administrative procedures defined by the affiliating university. Depending upon the location, urban versus rural, the overall facilities and capabilities also vary.

Despite controls of regulatory bodies, little attention has been paid to the unfavourable teacher student ratio. Unfavourable teacher student ratio results in poor outcomes. Unfortunately, in recent years, the quality of Higher education in general has nosedived and several factors have contributed to this decline. In order to understand the root of the problem it is necessary to delve into the factors that have contributed to the malaise. Some states of the country have fared poorly in this index while others have moved forward with great alacrity and done well on this front. These states are largely from southern India. [3]

Students entering the portals of Higher education are largely ill equipped for it. Their knowledge is insufficient and superficial and they have poor language skills. The root of the problem is poor primary and secondary education. When the same students enter the corridors of Higher Education, for which they are ill equipped, they fare poorly. Due to the malaise spreading to higher Education, it results in churning out of unemployable and unskilled workforce. In the absence of value-based education the system produces youth who have no social or cultural moorings.

Despite having an immense pool of youngsters, we have not channelized their energies into something substantial, of use to the nation. The youth are directionless. We need to train, channelize, and shape them in a way that they become not only employable, but a part of a strong nation building group. This can be done only if we are able to provide them good education base. Presently, our education system has failed to do that. It becomes imperative to investigate what ails Higher educational Institutions, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Higher Education is not meant to be for everyone. Schooling should prepare students to have skills that should give them employment. Only those who truly want to pursue Higher Education seriously should go to university or college. In recent years, no practical knowledge or skill has been provided to students. Teachers, overwhelmed by non-academic work, poor infrastructure, and



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privatization of education at all levels has contributed to poor teaching at school level, in addition to others. This paper will further contrive to look at factors that contributed to the problems that ail educational institutions.

**Problems at Primary level:** A large body of research shows that improvements in early childhood education and primary school pay off far more, in terms of later life outcomes than improvements in secondary school or higher education. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), in 2018, nearly fifty percent of all rural students in Grade 5 could not read a Grade 2 text and about 60% could not perform simple division. There is little point in having all students complete secondary school if many of them cannot even read a basic text. It becomes imperative to investigate the problem at primary level. [4](a) Teaching quality: In government schools, teachers have been given additional non-academic tasks. Teachers are supposed to prepare midday meals, be involved in census, in election duties at all levels, be involved in government exams of different kinds. Very often they go without weekly Sunday holidays. They are supposed to perform duties that take them away from teaching time. In such a situation, they are often unavailable to perform their teaching duties with responsibility.

To add to the woes, very often, in rural areas, there is only one teacher for all classes. There is shortage of teachers and the teachers are overburdened with academic and non-academic work. The students from such schools are passed, for it is the government policy not to fail students in these classes. Naturally, these students are not equipped enough. In other private and self-finance schools, the teachers are underpaid, and very often, not properly trained.

Another pressing problem is of inadequately trained teachers, due to which teaching quality suffers. There is a need for regular upgradation of teachers, in their subjects as well as use of technology. (b) No value education: Teachers play a big role in setting a role model to their students. However, such role models have been far and few in the recent years. In the absence of value-based education, students have no kindness, compassion, and a wish to be of service, as a result becoming indifferent citizens.

Teachers should be role models to their students by being polite, inclusive in their behaviour, showing kindness and showing a respect for law. When teachers behave in this way, they set an example to students. (c) Privatization of school education and corruption in education: Privatization of school education started somewhere around 2008, the period where the Right to Education Act was implemented. The Act was conceived in full thoughtfulness, compelling private schools to admit students from the strata of society which cannot afford to educate their child in such schools. This also led to a mushrooming of schools. The generally poor funding of state-run schools, and a lack of rigorous monitoring, and the unwillingness of the management of self-finance schools to reinvest in the system, have been detrimental to quality education at school level. The conditions for opening self-finance schools were exhaustive. However, the schools were given permission to operate without proper checks. They paid a hefty bribe to get No-objection Certificate. Such schools exist on paper only. There are no teachers, no students attending school. They charge a huge amount of fees from students and pass them. Naturally, such students have no knowledge of subjects, but are promoted to secondary level. (d) Poor infrastructure, no toilets: Mostly the buildings in government schools are in shambles, especially in rural areas. There is mildew in schools, making them very unwelcoming to teachers and students, alike. There are hardly any buildings in self-finance schools and a complete absence of toilets which is a basic necessity.

### Problems at Secondary and Higher secondary level

(a) Teaching quality: The problems encountered at primary level perpetuate at the secondary level too. Poor teaching quality, almost nil promotional avenues and indifferent teaching methods lead to students having little or no knowledge at all. In government schools, teachers are again expected to do a lot of non-teaching work. There is immense shortage of teachers in government, aided as well as self-finance schools. With poor teacher student ratio, there are poor outcomes. [3](b) Insufficient skilling and no vocational training: Surprisingly, there used to be regular courses in electrical workshop, carpentry, home science courses in stitching, embroidery, cooking, food preservation in olden days, but none of these courses are a part of curriculum any longer. This poses a problem as students are not equipped to seek jobs or get self-employment as they do not possess these skills. Students who are not interested in studies think that getting Higher Education might help them in getting a job, although they lack that capacity. Not everyone is suitable for entering into Higher Education.

At Higher Secondary level, there is almost complete absence of practicals in practical subjects like Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Music, Psychology, and Home Science. When these students come to seek admission in Higher Education, they do not have the basic knowledge/skills for doing lab work although it is a prerequisite for admission to undergraduate level. There is poor infrastructure in schools; in self-finance schools there is absolutely none. In government, aided and good public schools there is some infrastructure so they do conduct some practicals but it is not sufficient. Only 20% students have any exposure to practicals.(c)



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Downgrading of syllabus: UP board used to be one of the best boards as far as the syllabus content and rigorous examination system was concerned. In recent years, it has downgraded its syllabus level as well as quality of teaching. Perhaps the fact that self-finance schools far outnumber the government and aided schools have contributed to the degradation in quality. (d)Too Liberal marking: Recent years have seen a spurt in the marks that students get. These marks are unworthy of the quality of student. There has been too liberal marking. Ironically acquiring 100% marks in literature also seems possible now.

A recent observation disclosed that students getting 100% marks in practical (in schools where no practical was conducted!) fail in theory. The board has passed these students on the strength of total marks. Such students are seeking admission in Higher Education in the very same subject which they failed in theory in XII class board exams. (e)No choice of subjects: At the plus two level, students make a choice of their subjects. Arts, Commerce, Science. The Science stream is divided into the Biology stream and the Maths stream. Biology students study Biology, Physics and Chemistry, in addition to other subjects like languages and Art. Maths stream students study Maths, Physics and Chemistry. A student of Maths stream does not get to study Biology and vice versa. (f) No infrastructure, no toilets: The problem of poor-quality buildings persists in secondary schools. There is a complete absence of toilets or if they exist at all, they are used for storage or are so filthy that no one can enter them. Poor sanitation and hygiene results in girl students dropping out from the schools. It poses a large problem for women teachers also. (g) Indifferent parents' attitudes: A survey conducted by 'Basic Shiksha Vibhag' stated that several parents were sending their children to work in dhabas and hair salons. These children were aged 14 years and were registered in school but were being sent by their parents to earn money. The team warned the employers to not allow children to work at their place. The parents were also instructed to send their children to school [5] (h)Gender issues: Women face unsavoury and unpleasant remarks from their men colleagues quite often. Male colleagues are often patronizing and make life unbearable for women teachers at work.

### Problems in Higher Education

(a)Shortage of Teachers: A large number of teachers have been continuously retiring but there have been too few appointments to fill the vacant seats. The workload of absent teachers is sometimes borne by part time teachers who are appointed for a few months only by the management and are poorly paid. The quality of teaching suffers consequently. It results in poor teacher student ratio. Regular appointment to these vacant posts is essential for keeping the quality of teaching at desired levels. (b) Poor teacher student ratio: Poor teacher student ratio results in poor student outcomes. Colleges have been given a large number of seats in each stream, disproportionate to the number of teachers. When teachers are unable to give personal attention to students, or help them personally, the quality of teaching suffers and so do the student outcomes. The student-teacher ratio reflects the teacher's workload and how available they are to offer services and care to their students. It is a fact that the lower the number, the better the educational process and learning will be. At Higher Education level, teachers are overwhelmed by the sheer number of students that they must deal with. (c)Poor attendance of students: In state universities/colleges of Uttar Pradesh, attendance is not mandatory. A student with zero attendance is allowed to appear in exams. How much has the student gained from the teacher. His/her grades will consequently reflect this.

In central universities students must have 75% attendance, otherwise they are not allowed to appear in exams. The students from these universities do well academically and professionally. These universities also have better teacher student ratios. (d)Indifferent students: Due to an indifferent and deficient school education, when students enter Higher Education, their indifference continues. Either they absent themselves from college, or they are mute spectators in the teaching learning process. With an unfavourable teacher student ratio, teachers are unable to reach out to these students, even if they want to. Such students often drop out of Higher Education as they are unable to pass. This is especially true for many women students. Reluctance to educating their daughters by the parents, and quite often, domestic situations lead to this indifference and their consequent dropping out from Higher Education. (e)Privatization of Higher Education: Privatization of Higher Education has been done in a very poor manner in Uttar Pradesh. No checks, only bribes and no intent for establishing quality in Higher educational institutions has been the motto of all the managements who have rushed to open colleges without infrastructure, or proper teachers. The aim has just been to earn money by unscrupulous means. Teachers of aided colleges have also been party to this disaster by taking/demanding huge sums of money to appoint teachers. These teachers also take practicals in these self-finance colleges as external or internal examiners and take a hefty packet for signing the award list. Obviously, in absence of infrastructure, there is no practical worth the name done by the students and they end up getting very high marks. Some colleges do not exist. Geo tagging of these colleges revealed the complete absence of even a building.

In such a situation where students have passed without classes, without attending college, how can we expect them to be employable or even worthy of being called graduates. As of now, on an average, in any affiliating university of Uttar Pradesh, there



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are only about 5 %aided and government colleges. Most colleges are of self-finance type. Of these, only a miniscule number run properly. This minority has proper infrastructure, well qualified faculty and rigorous teaching. Unfortunately, the number of such self-finance colleges is very small. Majority of self-finance colleges only contribute to the kitty of the University. (f) No flexibility or horizontal mobility in the choice of undergraduate or post graduate programs. Till now, students were bound by what was rigidly allowed. So, arts stream students had no exposure to science subjects after class Xth, which continued in Higher education also. Similarly, Science stream students studied only languages beyond class Xth. In Higher education the science stream student does not get to study these also. Apart from no exposure to arts subjects, Science stream is further divided into two further streams, the biology stream, and the maths stream. Biology students study zoology, botany, and chemistry. Maths stream students study physics, chemistry, and maths (or statistics). Biology students do not study physics or maths. Maths students do not get to study zoology or botany. At present one needs to have a knowledge of biology if one is doing research in physics or chemistry. In the old type of subject selection, such interdisciplinary knowledge was denied to many. Availability of psychology or home science should have been a very good option for biology students because of the intersection of both subjects. (g) Poor Infrastructure, poor lab infrastructure, poor Wi-Fi and poor sanitation facilities:

Majority of colleges suffer from poor infrastructure, no upgradation in laboratories and atrocious toilet facilities. As mentioned earlier, several self-finance colleges barely have classes, they are conducted on paper only. In aided and government colleges the situation is slightly better. Most of the colleges need to upgrade their laboratories. Funding for these is a major issue. There has been no funding by UGC after 2012 on infrastructure development.

Colleges are having difficulties providing good Wi-Fi facilities to teachers and students, especially in smaller cities. Colleges also suffer from unhygienic and dirty toilets. Women students and teachers face a lot of difficulty in this regard. This may result in several health issues. Library facilities are poor and now, with more impetus to research by teachers quality of research in absence of a wide spectrum of journals suffers. Libraries are barely accessible to UG students. They get access to text books only. In totality, with poor Wi-Fi, poor library facilities, and poor toilets, colleges are not attractive spaces for teachers to do research and spend time in college. (h) Teachers overburdened with non-academic work: The last 3-4 years have seen an overburdening of non-academic duties on teachers. Government exams, held at almost every alternate Sunday, Throughout the year makes it compulsory for teachers to do these duties. With electoral duties on top of the already overburdened teacher does not take consideration into the fact that teachers need to rest and upgrade, prepare for teaching and research. This leaves the teachers very little time to teach. Students suffer consequently and it is reflected in their poor outcomes. Unfortunately, the refrain often heard is that teachers are highly paid and should be 'milked' to do other jobs. This happens in state colleges, recently, in Uttar Pradesh. (i) Poor working conditions for women: Although the number of women in universities is high, very few of them can advance in their careers due to a number of social reasons. Bearing a heavy professional as well as domestic burden, they often step back for child bearing, child rearing and care for the elderly duties. (j) Gender issues: Higher educational institutions should be free from the problem of harassment of women but it is not true. Women often face unpleasant remarks from their male colleagues. The problem can extend to women students too. In such a case the workplace becomes very unpleasant and unsafe to be in.

### New Education Policy 2020

Having stated the problems of Higher Education, let us see what the New Education Policy 2020 can contribute to address these issues. [7-9] New Education Policy 2020 or NEP 2020 envisages a complete restructuring of the education system, starting from the pre-school level to Higher Education. Having stated the problems of education at all levels, NEP 2020 proposes the following:

#### At School level

- Anganwadi centres will be strengthened, their workers will be well trained by NCERT. Emphasis in early schooling will be on the three R's. Teacher vacancies to be filled and teaching aids, both model chart type and digital, to be made available. Digital libraries to be set up, encouraging students to read will be a big focus in schools. Breakfast, in addition to mid-day meals to be provided to ensure good health of students. Regular health check-ups and health cards to monitor students' health.
- NEP 2020 envisages access to education for all. To include vocational education at all levels of school. Involvement of community and volunteer work to enhance learning in schools.
- The focus would be to reduce curriculum content, improve essential learning and critical thinking. Improvement in the areas of experiential learning, integration of Art and sports. Flexibility to be provided in course choices.
- Encouragement to multilingualism, promotion of Indian languages, with impetus to Sanskrit.
- Inculcation of scientific temper and special emphasis on vocational courses.
- Value based education: Teaching to 'do what is right' and respect for law.



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- Schools are not child producing machines. Every child is unique and the report card of each child will reflect the child's progress in different domains.
- Teachers will no longer be engaged in non-teaching activities.
- Creches to be made at workplace.
- Sensitization of teachers to gender issues, making workplaces safe.

#### At Higher Education level

- Moving towards multidisciplinary universities and colleges at UG level.
- Revamping curriculum to avoid repetition, continuous internal evaluation, and pedagogy.
- Affirming teacher integrity by merit appointments and their career progression.
- Proper regulations for HEIs. This should put a stop to malpractices in self-finance colleges and by teachers who inspect them.
- Inclusion and equity for students. Scholarships by philanthropists for under privileged students. Encouragement to online education and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Equal emphasis on teaching and research.
- Support to other HEIs and schools to develop them.
- Flexibility in curriculum, focus on communication, discussion, debate, and research.
- Credit based courses, Choice based credit system, transfer of credits from one HEI to another by establishing an Academic Bank of Credits. This will be a digital repository on the portal called ABACUS.
- Multiple exit options in UG program.
- UG research to start in third year.
- Support to socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDG).
- Opportunities to students to participate in sports, arts, drama, activity clubs and community service. Counselling to be made available to students. Quality medical facilities for students.
- Motivated and capable faculty. There should be no excuse for mediocrity and laxity.
- Clean drinking water, clean toilets, teaching supplies, library, labs, and classrooms equipped with latest technology.
- Vocationalization of education to be made compulsory. This will enable students to gain skills that can help them in their careers, encourage entrepreneurship and provide employment. It can also help them become 'employers'.
- Curbing commercialization of education. This should effectively eliminate self-finance HEIs which do not match with the expectations.
- Emphasis on good Teacher Education to train teachers to tackle the problems of school teaching.
- On campus creches.
- Funds need to be allocated for replacement teacher who will replace a woman faculty that needs to take a break for child bearing and child rearing.
- Sensitization of teachers as well as students to gender issues.

#### Steps to be taken by the government

- Suitable government funds for education of SEDGs.
- Provide technology tools for better learning outcomes.
- Gender balance in admissions to HEIs.
- Financial assistance to SEDGs in all HEIs.

#### Steps to be taken by HEIs

- Providing wheel chair accessible spaces.
- Sensitization of faculty, counsellors, and students on gender issues
- To provide proper infrastructure, laboratories, library, and sports facilities.

#### Conclusion

The problems of HEIs of Uttar Pradesh are many. UP happens to be a large state with a huge geographical spread. This spread gives these problems a unique touch. Some of the problems were created by the system which was unable to match up steps with the changing times. Some problems were a result of corruption at many levels, as well as inertia to address these issues. The plan as envisaged by NEP 2020 is humongous and ambitious. However, the implementation of NEP 2020 during a pandemic was hasty and



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HEIs were ill prepared to tackle it. If implemented properly, NEP 2020 might be able to address the problems we have outlined in this paper. The challenges are many and it requires leadership qualities to take hold of these issues. Involvement of community, Alumni, and volunteers might give it an impetus that it requires. Perhaps a well-intentioned approach and commitment may be effective in NEP 2020 to deliver optimistically.

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