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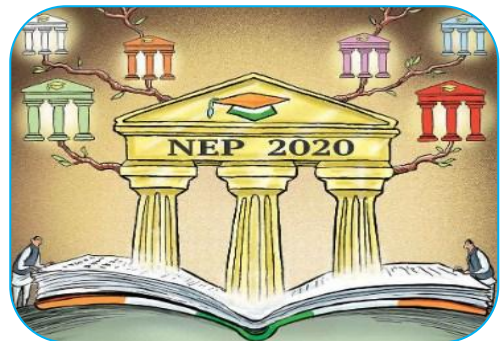
REVOLUTIONIZING HIGHER EDUCATION: ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF THE 2020 EDUCATION POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The New Education Policy (NEP 2020) announced by the Government of India was a refreshing and positive development amid the global challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many were surprised by the unexpected introduction of NEP 2020, and the proposed changes took many education experts by surprise. While the policy impacts both school and higher education, this paper primarily examines its effects on higher education. It also highlights the key features of NEP 2020 and analyzes their implications for the current education system.



KEYWORDS: NEP Recommendations, Covid-19 Impact, Higher Education Reform, Education System Analysis, Educationists' Perspective

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (NPE) is a policy created by the Government of India to enhance education across the country, covering everything from elementary schools to higher education institutions in both rural and urban areas. The first NPE was introduced in 1968 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the second in 1986 by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and the third in 2020 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, presents a new vision for India's education system, replacing the 1986 policy. This comprehensive framework addresses all levels of education and vocational training nationwide. The policy's goal is to overhaul India's education system by 2021. The language guidelines in the NEP are broad and advisory, leaving implementation decisions to states, institutions, and schools. NEP 2020 introduces several significant changes, including a target to increase state education spending from about 4 to 6 percent of GDP as soon as possible.

In January 2015, a committee led by former Cabinet Secretary T. S. R. Subramanian initiated the consultation process for the New Education Policy. Following the committee's report, a panel headed by former ISRO chief Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan submitted the draft NEP in June 2017. The Ministry of Human Resource Development released the 484-page Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) 2019 and conducted extensive public consultations. The Ministry received over 200,000 suggestions from 250,000 gram panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and 676 districts during the consultation process.

High-quality higher education should strive to cultivate individuals who excel, exhibit thoughtfulness, possess a well-rounded perspective, and demonstrate creativity. It should empower individuals to delve deeply into one or more specialized fields of interest while fostering the development of character, ethical and constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, a scientific mindset, creativity, a spirit of service, and the essential skills of the 21st century across various disciplines, including sciences, social sciences, the arts, humanities, languages, personal development, technology, and vocational subjects.

The new education policy introduces significant changes to the current system, with key highlights including the establishment of multidisciplinary universities and colleges, ensuring at least one institution in or near every district. It involves overhauling student curricula, teaching methods, assessment practices, and support systems to enhance the overall student learning experience. Additionally, it proposes the creation of a National Research Foundation to support outstanding peer-reviewed research and effectively foster scholarly pursuits at universities and colleges.

The primary challenges confronting the Indian higher education system encompass several factors: the rigid segregation of qualifications, premature specialization and the funneling of students into limited research fields, insufficient emphasis on research in many universities and schools, and a dearth of competitive funding for peer-reviewed academic research, exacerbated by the prevalence of sprawling affiliated universities resulting in subpar undergraduate education.

Efforts in institutional restructuring and consolidation aspire to address these issues by eradicating the fragmentation of higher education. This involves the transformation of higher education institutions into expansive multidisciplinary entities, fostering the development of well-rounded and inventive individuals, and positioning the country as a global educational and economic leader. A key objective is to elevate the gross enrolment ratio in higher education, including vocational training, from double it up to 50 percent by 2035.

A comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to education aims to enhance all aspects of human development – mental, cultural, social, physical, emotional, and moral – in a unified manner. Over time, this inclusive educational model should become the standard for all undergraduate programs, spanning medical, technical, and vocational disciplines. Creating ideal learning environments and providing robust student support involves adopting a holistic approach, incorporating well-designed curricula, interactive teaching methods, ongoing assessment, and sufficient student assistance.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

2.1. The main aim of this study is to examine how the New Education Policy 2020 influences higher education. It also highlights the key aspects of the NEP and assesses their effects on the current educational framework.

2.2. To examine the existing problems and hurdles faced by today's higher education system.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was entirely descriptive, relying on qualitative methods and utilizing secondary data. It primarily drew upon theoretical knowledge, necessitating a content analysis of available materials. Consequently, the researchers gathered data from diverse sources such as journals, books, reports, magazines, websites, and newspapers.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The organizational framework of higher education is poised for transformation with the complete implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Below are several notable adjustments that have been introduced in this context:

4.1. Undergraduate Program spanning four years

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces significant changes to higher education, including the extension of the undergraduate program from three years to four. This new structure comprises a certificate program in the first year, an advanced diploma program in the second year, attainment of a bachelor's degree in the third year, and finally, in the fourth year, the option to pursue a bachelor's degree with a focus on research.

4.2. Multiple Options for admission and exit

The four-year, interdisciplinary undergraduate program provides various entry and exit points. For example, a student who completes just one year of their undergraduate studies before leaving the institution can join the program in the second year instead of starting from scratch.

4.3. M.Phil. programme

Following the attainment of a master's degree, the M.Phil. credential is now recognized as an advanced level of higher education. This transformation has been influenced by the implementation of the New Education Policy. Consequently, the M.Phil. program will be discontinued, streamlining the higher education framework to offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees exclusively.

4.4. Academic Bank of Credit

The Academic Bank of Credit stands as a cornerstone within the Credit-Based system outlined in the National Education Policy 2020. Upon enrollment in a program and subsequent evaluation, a student's marks or credits are recorded within the credit bank under their name, akin to how a bank account reflects an individual's financial transactions. Consequently, individuals have the convenience of monitoring and accessing their credit status at any time.

4.5. Master degree programme - 1 year

Students who finish their undergraduate program in four years, incorporating a year of research, have the opportunity to obtain their master's degree within a single year. Conversely, those who complete their undergraduate studies in three years, excluding the final year of research, remain eligible to apply for admission to the master's program. However, their master's degree will require two years for completion.

4.6. Limit on private organizational fees

E-courses to be available in regional languages Numerous Indian colleges require exorbitant fees for higher education, leading to financial strain on many students and resulting in dropouts. To address this issue and achieve a 50 percent enrollment rate by 2035, the government has introduced a fee cap on private institutions, colleges, and universities. This means that institutions can only charge fees up to a specified cap, such as 50,000 rupees, regardless of the subject of study. The aim is to enhance accessibility to education by making it more affordable.

4.7. Regional Languages E-courses

Technology will play a role in education across various aspects such as planning, teaching, learning, assessment, as well as in the training of teachers, schools, and students. Electronic content will be accessible in regional languages, beginning with eight major languages including Kannada, Odia, and Bengali, in addition to the existing e-courses offered in Hindi and English.

5. CHALLENGES AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FACING INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Higher education serves a crucial role that demands attention. Consequently, India's higher education system grapples with a range of issues. India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) tertiary education stands at a mere 25.2 percent, notably lower compared to both developed nations and major developing counterparts. The higher education landscape in India grapples with issues such as rote

learning, inadequate emphasis on employability, and skill development, all stemming from systemic deficiencies. Furthermore, the sector faces infrastructural inadequacies, impeding its progress. Despite significant strides, numerous colleges, institutions, and universities across India lack even the most rudimentary facilities, highlighting persistent challenges. Chief among these is the imperative for enhanced accessibility and equality within higher education. The shortage of professors further compounds the issue, underscoring the urgent need for additional resources in academic institutions. Insufficient funding exacerbates the quality decline, exacerbating the overarching challenges facing higher education in India.

6. IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY (NEP-2020) ON HIGHER EDUCATION.

6.1. Revamping the Regulatory Framework of Higher Education

A significant change in NEP 2020 is the proposal to set up the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), as an umbrella body for higher education, excluding medical and legal education. This will usually bring out a question that what will happen to the present UGC and AICTE. HECI is aiming at reforming the higher education sector; the Bill will separate the Academic and Funding aspects of the sector. According to the new Bill, HECI will not have any financial powers. The funding processes which were handled by the University Grants Commission (UGC) will be taken care by the Ministry of Education, previously known as the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). This change however is expected to clear the regulatory mess in India's Higher Education system. HECI is expected to have four independent verticals - National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, General Education Council (GEC) for standard-setting, Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding, and National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation. To have uniformity in education standards, a single umbrella body was always a requirement and this has been a vision of numerous educationists. This is considered as the right step in streamlining education policy. However, to ensure quality of higher education, institutes must be measured based on relevant parameters like research, industry linkages, placements and academic excellence, etc. If the HECI can manage this, the benefits to its biggest stakeholder, the youth of India, might be significant.

6.2. Internationalization at home

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also facilitates the return of international universities and faculties to Asian countries, thereby posing a challenge for local institutions to enhance the quality of education they deliver. The potential for foreign universities to establish campuses within the nation is driving significant growth in the Indian education sector. Despite boasting one of the world's largest networks of higher education systems, with over 900 universities and 40,000 colleges, Asian countries lag behind in terms of Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), standing at only 26.3 percent. This figure is notably lower compared to other BRICS nations like China (51 percent) and Brazil (50 percent), as well as European and North American countries where GER exceeds 80

To address this gap and transition towards a knowledge-based economic model, significant advancements in global education within Asian countries are imperative. Reports suggest that Asian countries may require an additional 1,500 new higher education facilities by 2030 to accommodate a surge in student enrollment. Consequently, the Indian government must incentivize Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and make External Commercial Borrowing (ECB) accessible to bolster capital investment in the education sector.

With over seven lakh Indian students pursuing education abroad, there is a concerted effort by the ministry to enhance India's standing as an education hub. The initiative aims to curb brain drain by enabling overseas universities to offer high-quality education locally at reduced costs. Cross-border education, as highlighted by numerous international studies, not only benefits the economy but also fosters global awareness, cultural sensitivity, and collaboration. Foreign partnerships offer educational institutions an avenue to align their curriculum with global standards and provide students with diverse specialization options.

6.3. More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education

The NEP 2020 advocates for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to education, aiming to nurture various facets of human development—intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral—through an integrated framework. This inclusive education is envisioned to cultivate individuals equipped with essential 21st-century skills across diverse domains, including arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional fields. Emphasizing social responsibility and fostering soft skills such as communication and critical thinking, the NEP 2020 envisions the establishment of multidisciplinary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in or near every district by 2030. To realize this vision, HEIs will adopt flexible and innovative curricula featuring credit-based courses and projects focused on community engagement, environmental awareness, and values education. Environmental education will cover topics like climate change, pollution, and biodiversity conservation, while values education will instill humanistic, ethical, and constitutional values, along with life skills and principles of service. Global Citizenship Education (GCED) will empower learners to address global challenges and promote peace, inclusivity, and sustainability. Furthermore, students across HEIs will have opportunities for internships with local industries, artists, and research institutions to enhance practical learning and employability.

6.4. Striving for an Education that is More Comprehensive and Interdisciplinary

A comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to education would integrate the enhancement of an individual's moral, social, physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities. This shift towards a broader curriculum is evident even in engineering institutions like the IITs, where there is a growing emphasis on incorporating arts and humanities. Conversely, students in arts and humanities disciplines would seek to incorporate more scientific knowledge and develop vocational and soft skills. The educational framework across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should include credit-based courses and projects focusing on community engagement, environmental awareness, and values-based learning to foster such holistic development. Undergraduate programs would typically span three to four years, offering ample opportunities for students to graduate with the necessary qualifications during this period. Moreover, it is recommended that the four-year interdisciplinary Bachelor's program becomes the preferred option. To streamline academic records, the Indian government plans to establish an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC), facilitating the digital storage of academic achievements. This initiative aims to simplify the process of transferring credits between institutions, enabling students to seamlessly transition between colleges while retaining their earned credits.

6.5. The formats and durations of academic programs

Under the National Education Policy 2020, undergraduate degrees at any institution will span three or four years. Students have the option to leave the program during this period. Institutions must award a diploma after two years of study, a degree after three years, and a certificate for one year of study in any professional or vocational course. The Government of India will facilitate the creation of an Academic Bank of Credit to digitally store academic scores, allowing credits to be accumulated and applied toward a degree. This system benefits students who may need to pause their studies, enabling them to resume later without starting over. Although the NEP 2020 grants higher education institutions the autonomy to initiate postgraduate courses, there may be challenges in designing a one-year PG degree for students with a four-year UG degree and a two-year PG degree for those with a three-year UG degree.

6.6. Ideal Learning Environments and Assistance for Students

The foundations of high-quality learning encompass the curriculum, teaching methods, continuous assessment, and student support. To ensure that every student experiences an engaging and stimulating education, institutions and dedicated educators will develop curricula and teaching

strategies, using ongoing formative assessments to meet the objectives of each program. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should also decide on all assessment procedures, including those leading to final certification. The Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) will be revised to promote creativity and flexibility.

Moreover, each institution will integrate its academic plans, from curriculum development to the effectiveness of classroom interactions, into a comprehensive Institutional Development Plan (IDP). Teachers will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to act as instructors, mentors, and advisors. Additionally, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds will need support and encouragement to transition successfully to higher education. Therefore, universities and colleges will be required to establish high-quality support centers, with adequate funding and academic resources to achieve this goal effectively.

6.7. Innovation and Research in Higher Education

One of the key priorities of NEP 2020 is to encourage significant research and development investments from both public and private sectors. This will foster creativity and innovative thinking. For effective industry-led training, including upskilling and reskilling, strong industry commitment and close collaboration with academia are crucial. Additionally, it is important to cultivate the skills needed to understand and protect Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to fully benefit from them.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping a nation's economy, societal status, technological advancement, and fostering healthy behavior among its citizens. It falls upon the country's education department to enhance the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), ensuring equitable access to higher education for all individuals. The National Education Policy of 2020 aims to achieve this objective by introducing innovative measures to enhance the quality, affordability, and availability of higher education, including facilitating private sector involvement while maintaining stringent quality standards across all educational institutions. This policy is poised to have a positive and enduring impact on India's higher education landscape. The government's decision to permit international universities to establish campuses in India is commendable as it enables students to receive high-quality education within their own country. The establishment of interdisciplinary institutions will reinvigorate the focus on various disciplines, including the arts and humanities, promoting holistic education and fostering a strong knowledge base among students. NEP 2020 aims to modernize higher education in India, addressing the need to train experts across diverse fields, from agriculture to artificial intelligence, in preparation for the future. It presents an opportunity for countless aspiring students to acquire the necessary skill set for success. NEP 2020 marks a pivotal moment for higher education, but its transformative potential can only be realized through effective and well-managed implementation.

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