Re-imagining Higher Education: A Comprehensive Analysis of the National Education Policy's Influence on Educational Transformation

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Abstract –

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India aims to transform the higher education system by addressing key challenges and introducing transformative reforms. The policy emphasizes holistic development, multidisciplinary education, vocational training integration, and the use of technology in higher education. It seeks to increase access to higher education and improve learning outcomes by promoting flexibility in the curriculum and offering a wide range of courses. NEP 2020 prioritizes research and innovation, fosters international collaborations, and focuses on equity and inclusion. By implementing these reforms, NEP 2020 strives to create a balanced and fair society while positioning India as a global knowledge hub.

Keywords – Higher Education, NEP 2020, Institutional Restructuring, Teacher Education, Vocational Education, Professional Education, Life long Learning.

Introduction –

Education is essential for creating informed and responsible citizens who contribute to the well-being of society, the nation, and the planet. Higher education plays a crucial role in this process by equipping individuals with advanced knowledge, critical thinking skills, and specialized expertise. Higher education institutions foster innovation, research, and intellectual growth, nurturing future leaders and professionals who can address complex challenges.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India recognizes the significance of higher education and aims to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035. This objective seeks to increase access to higher education, creating more opportunities and a highly educated workforce. NEP 2020 promotes a holistic approach to learning, emphasizing multidisciplinary education, flexible course choices, and the integration of vocational training with academic programs. By incorporating practical training and skill development, the policy aligns higher education with industry needs, enhancing employability and fostering entrepreneurship.

Additionally, NEP 2020 prioritizes research and innovation to position India as a global knowledge hub. The policy encourages collaboration between universities, industries, and research institutions to promote cutting-edge research and technological advancements. Equity and inclusion are vital aspects addressed by NEP 2020. The policy focuses on reducing disparities in access to higher education by advocating for the inclusion of marginalized communities, women, and economically disadvantaged individuals. It strives to ensure equal opportunities for all, creating a more balanced and fair society.

Education Policies of India after Independence with reference to Higher Education –

After India gained independence in 1947, several education policies were implemented to address the needs and challenges of higher education in the country. Here are some key education policies introduced in India:

1. **University Education Commission (1948-1949):** Also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission, it aimed to examine the state of higher education and provide recommendations for its improvement. The commission emphasized the importance of autonomy, academic freedom, and research in universities.

2. **Education Commission (1964-1966):** Popularly known as the Kothari Commission, it focused on overall education reform in India. The commission emphasized the expansion and diversification of higher education, establishment of new universities, improvement of research facilities, and the integration of vocational education.

3. **National Policy on Education (1986):** This policy aimed to promote a common educational structure throughout the country and emphasized the importance of access, equity, and quality in higher education. It introduced measures to enhance vocational education, improve the curriculum, and strengthen research and development.

4. **National Policy on Education (1992):** This policy focused on the restructuring of higher education in India. It emphasized the autonomy of universities, introduced a credit-based system, and encouraged collaborations between universities and industries. The policy also aimed to promote professional education and distance learning.

5. **National Knowledge Commission (2005-2009):** This commission recommended reforms to make India a knowledge society. It advocated for increased investment in higher education, enhancement of research and innovation, promotion of open and distance learning, and the establishment of world-class universities.

6. **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** The most recent policy, NEP 2020, aims to transform the education system in India. It emphasizes multidisciplinary education, flexibility in curriculum, integration of vocational training, and the use of technology in higher education. NEP 2020 also promotes research and innovation, global collaborations, and holistic development of students.

NEP 2020 and Higher Education –

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India places significant emphasis on higher education and introduces transformative reforms. NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of holistic development, multidisciplinary education,

and the integration of vocational training in higher education. One of the key objectives of NEP 2020 is to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035, which seeks to increase access to higher education for a larger population. The policy aims to accomplish this by promoting flexibility in the curriculum, encouraging multiple entry and exit points, and offering a wide range of courses across disciplines.

NEP 2020 advocates for the establishment of multidisciplinary institutions and the integration of vocational education into mainstream higher education. This integration aims to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills, enhancing employability and entrepreneurship among students.

The policy also emphasizes the importance of research and innovation in higher education. NEP 2020 encourages the creation of a robust research ecosystem, promotes collaboration between universities, industries, and research institutions, and aims to position India as a global knowledge hub.

Furthermore, NEP 2020 recognizes the significance of technology in higher education. The policy encourages the use of digital and online learning platforms, promoting blended learning approaches and providing increased access to quality education.

Proposed solutions aimed at tackling the difficulties present in the current higher education system through NEP 2020–

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights the numerous challenges present in the current higher education system. These challenges include a fragmented ecosystem, inadequate focus on learning outcomes, rigid segregation of disciplines, limited opportunities for underprivileged individuals, restricted institutional autonomy, the prevalence of large affiliating universities, insufficient faculty development, a lack of emphasis on research, and an ineffective regulatory framework.

The NEP 2020 proposes several solutions to address the problems in the present Indian higher education system. These solutions are outlined as follows:

1. **Institutional Restructuring:**
   - Fragmentation will be overcome by establishing large Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or clusters with more than 3000 students
   - Emphasis will be placed on multidisciplinary education, phasing out single-stream HEIs and transforming them into multidisciplinary institutions, including IITs and IIMs
   - Universities will be categorized as either research-intensive or teaching-intensive
   - Colleges will either become autonomous or constituent colleges of a university, with no affiliation status after 2035
   - The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) will be increased from 28% to 50% by 2035.
   - Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) can be achieved through Online
   - Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Learning (OL) while maintaining quality and standards equivalent to on-campus programs.

- The complex nomenclature of HEIs such as 'deemed to be university', 'affiliating university', etc., will be simplified to 'university'.

2. **Holistic and Multidisciplinary Higher Education:**

- Universities will adopt holistic and multidisciplinary education with a focus on arts and humanities to stimulate Indian education. Credits will be given for arts and humanities subjects taken through respective departments or online platforms.
- Resources and infrastructure will be improved to meet global learning and assessment standards.
- High-stakes exams will be replaced by continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

3. **Internationalization and Higher Education:**

- Foreign universities will be allowed to establish campuses in India, and Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses abroad.
- Greater mobility will be facilitated for students who wish to study or conduct research in foreign institutions.
- Three types of programs will be defined for degrees awarded by Indian and foreign collaborators:
  a) Twinning Programme involves enrolling at an Indian Higher Education Institution (HEI) in a conventional mode and receiving a degree from the same institution. It allows for up to 30% of credits to be earned at a foreign institute without overlapping.
  b) Joint Degree Programme is a collaborative program offered by an Indian and a foreign HEI, resulting in a joint degree. In this program, at least 30% of credits must be obtained from each institution in a conventional mode.
  c) Dual Degree Programme entails a joint program offered by an Indian and a foreign HEI in the same discipline. It requires separate admissions and leads to the attainment of two degrees. At least 30% of credits must be earned from the Indian HEI in a conventional mode.

4. **Motivated and Capable Faculty:**

- Transparent processes and criteria will be established for faculty recruitment.
- Basic infrastructure and facilities will be provided.
- Faculty will have the freedom to design curricula and focus more on creativity and research.
- Excellence will be rewarded and incentivized.

5. **Equity and Inclusiveness:**

- Special provisions will be made for socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs).
- High-quality higher education will be delivered with a focus on equity and inclusion, enhancing employability for SEDGs.

6. **Teacher Education:**

- Teacher education programs will be grounded in Indian values, languages, knowledge, ethos, and traditions.
- Multidisciplinary universities and colleges will establish educationally sound and integrated teacher education programs.

7. **Redefining Vocational Education:**

- Emphasis will be given to vocational education, ensuring that every child learns at least one vocation.
- By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system will have exposure to vocational education.
- Higher education institutions will offer vocational education in partnership with industry and NGOs, based on skills gap analysis and local opportunities.

8. **National Research Foundation (NRF):**

- The NRF will be established to transform the quality and quantity of research in India.
- It will fund and seed research, governed independently by a rotating Board of Governors consisting of top researchers and innovators.

9. **Transformed Regulatory System:**

- The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will serve as the umbrella institution, encompassing all regulatory bodies. It will consist of four verticals:
  a. The National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) will function as the primary regulator for the higher education sector, excluding medical and legal education.
  b. The National Accreditation Council (NAC) will be a meta-accrediting body responsible for accrediting institutions based on basic norms, public self-disclosure, good governance, and outcomes reported in Institutional Development Plans by HEIs.
  c. The Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) will handle funding and financing of higher education, following transparent criteria. It will also oversee the disbursement of scholarships and developmental funds to launch new focus areas and enhance the quality of program offerings.
  d. The General Education Council (GEC) will establish expected learning outcomes for higher education programs. It will also formulate the National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF), which will be aligned with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) to facilitate the integration of vocational education into higher education.

10. **Curbing Commercialization:**

- To curb commercialization, effective measures will be implemented to combat and prevent its influence within the higher education sector. A transparent system of public disclosure will be established to ensure accountability in all financial matters related to this issue.

11. Effective Governance and Leadership:

- The implementation of robust self-governance practices and the appointment of exceptional leaders based on merit will be prioritized.

- As part of a long-term vision, all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India will strive to achieve independent self-governance within a span of 15 years, operating under their respective Boards of Governance (BoGs).

- The objective is to ensure that all HEIs are free from direct government control, fostering an environment of autonomy and academic freedom.

12. Professional Education:

- Agricultural universities, legal universities, health science universities, technical universities, and stand-alone institutions in other fields should strive to transform into multidisciplinary institutions, providing comprehensive and interdisciplinary education. Additionally, there should be a focus on offering technical education with a multidisciplinary approach.

- Institutions that offer legal education should consider implementing bilingual education programs to cater to future lawyers and judges, providing instruction in both English and the state's language.

- Students pursuing allopathic medical education should acquire a fundamental understanding of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), and conversely, students studying AYUSH should have a basic knowledge of allopathic medicine.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on preventive healthcare and community medicine, recognizing the importance of proactive measures to promote well-being within communities.

13. Adult Education and Life Long Learning:

- The new education policy recognizes the significance of adult education and lifelong learning. It acknowledges the strong correlation between literacy rates and per capita GDP worldwide. In line with this, the policy aims to achieve 100% literacy by leveraging technology and online education platforms.

- To effectively address adult education, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will be dedicated to this cause. It will focus on developing and implementing programs with defined outcomes that cater specifically to adult learners. This dedicated focus on adult education will ensure that individuals of all ages have access to educational opportunities and can enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their lives.

- By emphasizing adult education and lifelong learning, the new education policy aims to empower individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate actively in the socio-economic development of the country. It recognizes that education is not limited to formal schooling and extends to all stages of life. By promoting lifelong learning, the policy seeks to create a society that values continuous growth, personal development, and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

14. Indian Languages, Arts and Culture:

- The neglect and decline of Indian languages is a concerning issue, with more than 220 languages being lost in the past 50 years. UNESCO has designated 197 Indian languages as 'endangered,' and 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India are facing significant challenges.

- The new education policy, NEP 2020, recognizes the importance of Indian languages and culture. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will utilize the mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction and may also offer bilingual programs.

- To further promote the preservation and development of Indian languages, the establishment of the Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) is proposed. Additionally, Sanskrit, a classical language, will be mainstreamed with strong offerings in schools, including as one of the language options in the three-language formula, as well as in higher education.

15. Technology Use and Integration (Digital India Campaign):

- The NEP 2020 proposes the creation of the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) as a platform for exchanging ideas on utilizing technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, and administration in education.

- The policy encourages the use of technology-based education platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM to facilitate learning and provide access to educational resources.

- NEP 2020 identifies disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, and Machine Learning as preferred areas for Ph.D. research in order to promote innovation and advancements in these fields.

16. Online and Digital Education:

- Challenges in online digital education include the availability of affordable computing devices, internet connectivity, and power availability. Online assessment and practical aspects of performing arts and science education present limitations.

- The policy suggests that a blended mode of learning, combining online and offline methods, may yield better results for students.

- NEP 2020 outlines a timeline, stating that the policy will be operational until 2040, after which a comprehensive review will be conducted to assess its effectiveness.

17. Structure and Lengths of Undergraduate Degree Programs:

- Undergraduate degrees will have a flexible duration of either 3 or 4 years, with multiple exit options within this period, accompanied by appropriate certifications.

- The establishment of an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) is proposed, which will digitally store academic credits earned from recognized Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to facilitate the transfer of credits between institutions.

18. Structure and Lengths of Degree Programs - Master's Degree:

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will have the flexibility to offer different designs of Master's programs, including a 2-year program with a dedicated research-focused second year, a 1-year program for students with a 4-year Bachelor's degree including research, and an integrated 5-year Bachelor's/Master's program.
- Undertaking a Ph.D. will require a Master's degree or a 4-year Bachelor's degree with research, while the M.Phil. program will be discontinued.

19. Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities:

- The establishment of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUS) is proposed to set the highest global standards in quality education and promote multidisciplinary learning across India.

20. Changing Scenario of Accreditation:

- The NEP 2020 introduces the National Accreditation Council (NAC) to replace the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for accrediting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The accreditation process will have a binary grading system.
- The parameters for accrediting HEIs will be revised to place greater emphasis on career progression and professional skills.

21. Institutional Preparedness for NEP:

- Institutions should focus on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), aligning their curriculum, teaching, and learning practices with OBE principles.
- Key components of OBE include curriculum design, assessment of outcomes, and evidence-based corrective actions.
- HEIs are encouraged to align their curriculum to enhance students' academic, pragmatic, ethical, physical, spiritual, societal, and emotional intelligence, in line with the holistic development goals of the new education policy.

Conclusions –

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India marks a significant step towards transforming the higher education system in the country. The policy recognizes the importance of higher education in creating informed citizens and aims to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035, thereby increasing access to higher education. NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary education, flexibility in curriculum, and the integration of vocational training to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical skills. The policy emphasizes research and innovation, encouraging collaboration between universities, industries, and research institutions to position India as a global knowledge hub. It also addresses equity and inclusion by advocating for the inclusion of marginalized communities, women, and economically disadvantaged individuals, ensuring equal opportunities for all. The problems in the current higher education system, such as fragmentation, lack of multidisciplinary education, and limited research focus, are addressed through various solutions proposed by NEP 2020. These solutions include

institutional restructuring, holistic and multidisciplinary education, internationalization, motivated faculty, equity and inclusiveness, vocational education, the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF), a transformed regulatory system, adult education and lifelong learning, preservation of Indian languages and culture, and the use of technology in education.

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