

National Education Policy 2020 Transformative Road Map for Higher Education System

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Abstract

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) lays out a roadmap for 2040, as well as a strategy for improving school and higher education in India. This was not submitted to Parliament or accepted by it. Since education is a concurrent topic under the Constitution, its operation would be mostly dependent on state governments. The history of previous national education initiatives (1968 and 1986) shows that adoption and collaboration in a federal system is a dynamic mechanism that can take up to two decades.

India's education problem persists more than 70 years since independence. It has risen in size with the passing of time and now stares us down. Without any study of why something went wrong or a diagnosis of what ails schooling in India, the NEP knows the signs of the ailment and leaps to conclusive prescriptions. This failure is due to its narrow emphasis on education, which lacks or abstracts from the fiscal, social, and political backgrounds that have affected outcomes.

The other constraint is equally essential. The NEP is very straightforward about the end goal, but it is quiet about the journey. The topic of how we'd get there isn't addressed. The anticipated transition will not occur until more equitable socio-economic conditions in terms of access to education are created, the culture of educational institutions, regulators, and governments is changed, and political intrusions in every field of education are eliminated. This is a far-off fantasy. The complexities of higher education as well as the main highlights of the New National Education Policy were addressed in this article.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Colleges, Universities, Higher Education, Autonomy, Teaching-Learning

Introduction

In most government schools, a large number of teachers are absent, and a much larger number of those who are present do not teach nor earn salaries because they are not responsible and do not matter as political constituencies. It increases the number of students who drop out. Bad learning results are well-known. As a result, almost half of students whose parents can hardly afford the fees enroll in private colleges, where the level of teaching and learning is mostly subpar. For most families, good private schools are practically out of reach.

At the peak of the class 12 board examinations, there has been a massive increase in grade inflation. As a result, a minor lapse in results will effectively shut the door on a vast number of students, sealing their fates.

The NEP's emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy is commendable. Its aim is to provide a learning environment and to reduce the tyranny of exams by combining uniform assessment in Classes 3, 5, and 8 with less rigorous board exams in Classes 10 and 12. This will necessitate radical shifts in people's mindsets and political realities. For school-leavers, the planned nationwide aptitude test would serve as a potential last-chance opportunity. The coaching-syndrome and exam-tyranny will reappear in a different incarnation, thanks to markets and rivalry. The public provision of high-quality school education, which has so far been a disappointment, is critical. The standard of private schools will increase as a result of good government schools.

Opportunities for school-leavers to succeed in higher education are clearly insufficient, and what does exist is insufficient. The vast pool of potential and Darwinian selection processes in Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management have resulted in pockets of excellence. However, they are of no consolation because universities are the lifeblood of higher education because they provide educational resources to the general public. For the last three decades, most public colleges have seen a gradual drop in standards. There are few private colleges, and far fewer that are nice.

A pincer drive has engulfed higher education. For one thing, there is an expectation that markets can fix the issue through private players, which is contributing to education as an industry, leaving out those who cannot afford it and preventing quality assurance through legislation. For another, administrations that believe in the magic of markets—both at the national and state levels—are virtual power freaks when it comes to public universities, or for bribery, ideology, or special interests. Universities' politicisation has suffocated democracy and stifled innovation without having any oversight. The standard of education is a side effect.

The NEP's suggested consistency in the duration and composition of undergraduate degrees is questionable. If Bachelor's and Master's programmes are either 3+2 or 4+1, students would be unable to move from institutions due to incompatibility. It would be almost difficult to develop curricula that are appropriate for both students who leave and those who remain to completion if any institution offers an exit opportunity at the end of the year. In universities where science is still undervalued, the elimination of MPhil programmes could stifle research capability and encouragement. The emphasis on a multidisciplinary approach is concerning because research is rooted in disciplines for undergraduates. Their course selection would provide them with versatility.

The NEP recommends a "light but tight" regulatory system of four distinct verticals for supervision, accreditation, finance, and standards, all of which are housed in a single agency, the Higher Education Commission of India. In every country where higher education has achieved perfection, these four roles are not fulfilled by a single agency. Given the government's bureaucratic culture of interference and power, such centralization would inevitably result in "tight" rather than "light" regulation. By 2035, the NEP expects to provide independent higher education agencies thanks to an elected Board of Governors, but there may be several setbacks

along the way. As a result, also 88 years after Independence, autonomy for India's public universities will remain elusive.

The NEP 2020 is a powerful declaration of desires and expectations. It has positive ideas paving the way to heaven. Regrettably, economic, social, and political realities may pose a threat to this utopia.

NEP 2020 has achieved more than just brevity. It also progresses in terms of content. It significantly simplifies the sector's proposed regulatory framework. It, for example, grants the Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog and related parallel bodies in the states a peaceful burial. The commission was introduced as an umbrella constitutional entity to which various regulatory authorities must report in the draught text. The creation of such an organisation, as well as its state-level branches, would have contributed to an increasingly overburdened structure.

According to the policy, the existing structure of colleges affiliated with universities will be phased out in the long run. Each college will either be completely merged into a university or transformed into a self-contained degree-granting institution. Each higher education institution (HEI), whether college or university, will be governed by an independent board.

Several established small colleges that are pedagogically unviable and financially expensive will be replaced with larger HEIs under the scheme. Each HEI will eventually have at least 3,000 pupils. HEIs would be able to combine science and teaching according to their capabilities, with the sector inevitably consisting of highly research-intensive institutions on the one hand and highly teaching-intensive institutions on the other. This is the general arrangement of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The long-term target of full consolidation along these lines is set for 2035, according to the policy. However, the programme includes a plethora of low-hanging fruit that can be harvested in five years or less. Converting leading colleges into independent, board-managed HEIs; allowing undergraduate students to take courses in all disciplines; launching a four-year bachelor's degree; opening India to international universities; introducing technical education into college curricula; and establishing a National Research Foundation are among them. For the next five years, the government shall develop a time-bound schedule to enact these reforms.

The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Act is the starting point for these reforms. This act's general contours are outlined in the policy. The HRD ministry has conducted detailed consultations and groundwork in preparation for the act's drafting. Rather than dragging its heels, the ministry must now focus on finalising the draught act that will enable the new commission to carry out the reforms. By the end of 2021, the target should be to have a fully operational commission with all staff in place.

The ability of HECI to confer degree-giving control on HEIs would be a critical component of bringing about the reforms proposed by NEP 2020. This authority is currently held by the federal and state governments, as well as the University Grants Commission. Via law, the federal and state governments create degree-granting agencies. Any current academic or teaching HEI can be converted into a deemed-to-be university by the UGC. These capabilities will have to be moved

to HECI and concentrated there. Only then would the commission be able to establish degree-granting independent colleges under board administration in the short term, and a higher education structure based on massive HEIs with no affiliated colleges in the long term.

International organizations would need to be accommodated in a versatile way under the HECI Act. At the moment, the proposal only allows the top 100 universities in the world to open campuses in India. There's no guarantee that these universities will hurry to set up shop in India. They are likely to be reluctant because they have no previous experience serving as a guide to logistical and bureaucratic barriers in India. As a result, HECI will need enough flexibility to open the door wider to other, lower-ranked foreign institutions, depending on how these top 100 institutions respond. Finally, any international organization that aids in raising the overall educational standard should be welcomed.

Also, within the existing regulatory framework of higher education, changes such as allowing undergraduate students to take classes in all disciplines, launching a four-year undergraduate degree, and giving autonomy to leading colleges can be introduced. On the recommendation of a Niti Aayog committee that I chaired, the process of granting colleges autonomy began in February 2018. This has improved the efficiency of the roughly 60 leading colleges that were given autonomy. This process can be intensified now that NEP 2020 has placed its imprint on the development of autonomous colleges on a wide scale. When HECI is in operation, these colleges will be granted degree-granting authority.

Challenges in the current Higher Education System

Enrollment

- According to the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report for 2018-19, India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is just 26.3 percent, which is low as compared to developed and developing countries.
- With the school enrollments, the availability of higher education institutes in the country is inadequate to satisfy the rising demand.

Quality

- Ensuring the standard of higher education in India is one of the most pressing issues facing the country today. The government, on the other hand, is constantly focused on high-quality schooling.
- Despite this, a substantial number of colleges and universities in India are unable to fulfil the UGC's minimum standards, and our universities are unable to compete with the world's best universities.

Political Interference

- Policymakers' the involvement in higher education management jeopardises the sovereignty of HEIs.
- Students also organise campaigns, lose sight of their own goals, and continue to pursue political careers.

Poor Infrastructure and Facilities

- Bad infrastructure is another issue confronting India's higher education system; in fact, public-sector institutes have inadequate physical facilities and infrastructure.
- For several years, faculty shortages and the state school system's failure to recruit and maintain well-qualified teachers have posed threats to public education.
- Despite the fact that there are many openings in higher education, a large number of NET/PhD applicants are unemployed.

Inadequate Research

- In higher education institutions, there is a lack of emphasis on science, as well as insufficient funding and services, as well as a shortage of qualified professors to advise students.
- The majority of academic scholars do not have fellowships or do not receive them on schedule, which has a direct or indirect impact on their research. Furthermore, research centres and businesses are loosely linked to Indian higher education institutions.

Poor Governance Structure

- Over-centralization, hierarchical processes, and a lack of responsibility, openness, and discipline plague Indian education management.
- As a result of the increasing number of affiliated colleges and students, the financial workload on universities has increased dramatically, diluting the central emphasis on academia and science.

Key highlights of the New National Education Policy

The NEP brings about a range of changes in the system of higher education aiming to improve it with the goal of “creation of greater opportunities for individual employment.

- Establishing a higher education infrastructure that includes broad, multidisciplinary universities and colleges in or near every district, as well as more HEIs across India that offer programmes in local/Indian languages.
- Offering faculty and institutional control by moving away from a static HE programme and toward multidisciplinary undergraduate education.
- Improving learning outcomes by redesigning the curriculum, pedagogy, grading, and student service.
- Reinforcing faculty and academic leadership credibility by merit-based promotions and career advancement based on teaching, study, and service.
- Creating the National Science Foundation to finance the most promising, peer-reviewed research and to effectively seed research in universities and schools.
- Improved HEI governance through highly qualified autonomous boards with academic and managerial control, as well as “light but strict” oversight by a single higher education regulator.
- Increasing access, diversity, and inclusion through a variety of initiatives, such as private/philanthropic colleges providing scholarships to poor and underprivileged students.

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- Providing online instruction and Open Distance Learning opportunities to all learners (disadvantaged/special needs learners) (ODL).

Suggestions

Revamping State HEIs

- State colleges will have to commit to doing a lot more to the State and the residents in order to get even more money and assistance from the State system.
- They must develop a new agenda and programmes that directly meet the needs of the state, its industries, culture, and community, and then convince state-level actors to agree to full ownership and support.

Foreign Collaboration

- For better quality and collaborative research, the government should encourage cooperation between Indian higher education institutes and top foreign institutes, as well as linkages between national research labs and research centres of top institutions.

Multidisciplinary Approach

- Higher education should have a multidisciplinary approach such that students' expertise is not limited to their own disciplines.
- Both public and private HEIs must be free of political affiliations and equipped with adequate utilities and services.

Conclusion

The NEP is merely a guideline and is not required to be followed. The suggested policies can only be enforced collaboratively by the Centre and the states because education is a concurrent matter (both the Centre and the state governments can make laws on it). This is not going to change right away. The current government has set a deadline of 2040 for the full implementation of the scheme. A sufficient amount of funding is also necessary; the 1968 NEP was hampered by a lack of funds. To formulate action plans for each part of the NEP, the government plans to form subject-specific committees with representatives from related ministries at both the federal and state levels. Multiple agencies, including the HRD Ministry, state Education Departments, school boards, NCERT, Central Advisory Board of Education, and National Testing Agency, will be included in the proposals. An annual collective assessment of development towards defined goals will accompany the planning.

Higher education in India has grown at a rapid pace in the seven decades since independence, but accessibility and efficiency remain issues. If India wishes to see economic growth and prosperity at the grassroots level, it must make education a top priority.

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