

National Education Policy 2020: Opportunities of Professional Education and Feasibility of Online and Digital Education

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Abstract

The NEP 2020 seeks to promote interdisciplinary research and innovation in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). India now becomes a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy due to 'Digital India Campaign' and it plays an important role in the transformation of education because relationship between technology and education is bidirectional. Agriculture, legal and healthcare education must be revamped in order to make it professional education and globally competitive. The NEP 2020 is built on the pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability. India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. Professional development through multidisciplinary education is the need of the hour. In India, there are about 40,000 colleges and 800 universities but in spite of that the rate of enrolment in higher education is 26.3% in 2018 compared to primary and secondary education. The NEP aims to achieve at least 50% enrolment ratio in higher education by 2035. In this backdrop, the main objectives of this paper are: (i) to highlight the opportunities

of professional education as envisioned in NEP 2020 and (ii) to examine the feasibility of online and digital education as an alternative mode of quality education as proposed by NEP 2020. This paper concludes that destination of NEP 2020 is very much clear but how to reach that destination and how long it will take to reach that destination is not clear.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), AYUSH, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), DIKSHA, SWAYAM, Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).

1. Introduction

The current NEP 2020 which comes after 34 years of the previous policy of 1986 intends to bring a systematic reform in the education sector of India whereas the previous NEPs of 1968 and 1986 talked about incremental reforms only. It aims at equitable access to higher quality education for all learners irrespective of their social and economic background. Promotion of education from school to college level among all the people of India is the main objective of formulating the National Education Policy. The education policy is a comprehensive framework which covers education at schools and also at higher education levels including vocational training at both rural and urban areas. The first NEP was announced in the year 1968 during the tenure of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the second NEP was announced during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi in the year 1986 which was modified in the year 1992 and the third one after 34 years by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the

year 2020. The Union Cabinet of India approved the NEP on 29th July, 2020 in order to bring several changes in the Indian education system. The introduction of new education policy is going to benefit students, teachers, promote autonomy, reduce regulatory hassles etc. The policy is going to transform education by 2030. At present India spends 4.6% of GDP on education and the new education policy aims to increase the public investment by state governments and central government in the Education sector to reach 6% of GDP at the earliest. The new policy is a guideline and advisory in nature, the implementation of which depends on the stakeholders' acceptance and attitude towards it.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are:

- (i) To highlight the opportunities of professional education as envisioned in NEP 2020, and
- (ii) To examine the feasibility of online and digital education as an alternative mode of quality education as proposed by NEP 2020.

3. Survey of Literature

According to The Indian Express (Sept. 08, 2020), The NEP proposes sweeping changes including opening up of Indian higher education to foreign universities, dismantling of the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), introduction of a four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate programme with multiple exit options, and discontinuation of the M. Phil programme.

According to Indian Era (September 07, 2020). The reforms and objectives of the NEP 2020 are provided from

a broader perspective, and it's not mandatory for state governments to follow them.

According to Mint, the devil lies in implementation (2020), “The NEP proposes a ‘light but tight’ regulatory framework under a single central authority, but given our culture of governmental control, it could end up as ‘tight’ rather than ‘light’.

4. Methodology

The information for this article is mainly collected from secondary sources like Internet, books, magazines and journals.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Professional Education

Professional education involves education in ethics, education in the discipline, education for practice etc. involving critical and interdisciplinary thinking, debate discussion, research, and innovation. In the overall higher education professional education is considered as integral part. The stand-alone institutions like, agricultural universities, legal universities, health science universities, technical universities, and stand-alone institutions must aim to become multidisciplinary institutions offering holistic and multidisciplinary education.

- **Agricultural Education:** The proposal of NEP 2020 is the revival of Agricultural education with allied disciplines. Although Agricultural Universities comprise approximately 9% of all universities in the country. To improve the productivity of agriculture capacity and quality of agriculture and allied disciplines needs to be improved. In agriculture and veterinary sciences, the preparation of professionals through programmes integrated with general education needs to be

increased sharply in future. The development of professionals will be given importance and curricula of agricultural education will be designed by keeping in mind the development of professionals with the ability to understand and use local knowledge, traditional knowledge, and emerging technologies while being acquainted with the knowledge of critical issues such as climate change, declining land productivity, food sufficiency for our growing population, etc.

- **Legal Education:** Legal education must be revamped in order to make it a professional education and globally competitive by embracing new technologies for wider access to timely delivery of justice. The curricula for legal studies must be developed keeping in mind socio-cultural contexts history of legal thinking, principles of justice, the practice of jurisprudence, and other related content appropriately and adequately. The states must offer the law education to the future lawyers and judges in bilingual languages- in English and in the language of the State.

- **Healthcare Education:** The re-envisioning of healthcare education is the need of the hour and keeping in mind that requirement healthcare educational programmes need to match the role requirements that graduates will play. The healthcare system must be integrative which means that all students of allopathic medical education must have a basic understanding of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), and vice versa. In all forms of healthcare education emphasis will be given to preventive healthcare and community medicine.

- **Technical Education:** It includes degree and diploma programmes in, engineering, technology, management, architecture, town planning, pharmacy, hotel management, catering technology, etc. These programmes are very

important and critical for India's overall development. For creating greater demands of manpower in these sectors the need is closer collaboration between industry and higher education for driving research and innovation in these fields. Technical education at present needs to be offered within multidisciplinary education institutions and programmes. In India professional are to be developed in the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI), 3-D machining, big data analysis, and machine learning, in addition to genomic studies, biotechnology, nanotechnology, neuroscience etc.

5.2. Fundamental Principles of NEP 2020

The fundamental principles of the Policy are:

i) Holistic Development: The principle of NEP 2020 is to promote holistic development of students in both academic and non-academic spheres.

ii) Identifying capabilities of students: Identifying, recognizing and strengthening the unique capabilities of each student is another principle of this new policy.

iii) Multi-disciplinary education: To ensure unity and integrity of knowledge the policy is in favour of multi-disciplinary education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports.

iv) Flexibility: The learners according to this policy can choose their own learning trajectories and programs i.e. career paths as per their interests and talents.

v) Life Skills: Another principle of this new policy is the promotion of life skills such as communication, teamwork, cooperation, and resilience among the students and teachers.

vi) Regular Formative Assessment: The principle of this

policy is in favour of regular formative assessment in place of summative assessment.

vii) Heart of learning process: The principle of this policy is that teachers and faculty members of the higher education institutions should be considered as the heart of the learning process.

viii) No hard separations: Another important principle of this policy is that this policy does not consider any separation between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, vocational and academic streams, among others to eliminate harmful hierarchies and silos in areas of learning.

ix) Light but Tight regulatory framework: This policy is in favour of making regulatory framework light but tight by promoting integrity, transparency and resource efficiency of higher education system.

5.3. Impact of Technology on Education

The Digital India Campaign has made India a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy and it plays an important role in the transformation of education because relationship between technology and education is bidirectional.

It is expected that in multiple ways technology is going to impact education but the manifestation can be seen in some forms during the present time. What students learn in the classroom and how they learn is going to be changed due to the use of new technologies like artificial intelligence, smart boards, machine learning, block chains, handheld computing devices, adaptive computer testing for student development, and other forms of educational software and hardware. Technology is going to change the educational processes and its outcomes.

In the NEP 2020, proposal is given to improving the multiple aspects of education by integrating technology and education and also by creating an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF). It will provide a platform on the basis of which free exchange of ideas to enhance learning, assessment, planning and administration of higher education has been contemplated.

The functions of NETF will be to:

- a) provide independent evidence-based advice to Central and State Government agencies on technology-based interventions;
- b) build intellectual and institutional capacities in educational technology;
- c) envision strategic thrust areas in this domain; and
- d) articulate new directions for research and innovation.

In higher education for better teaching-learning process, technology-based platforms like DIKSHA/SWAYAM will be integrated and development of e-content will be given more importance. The integration will help in the professional development of teachers, educational planning, management, evaluation process, admission and the process relating to teaching-learning and evaluation processes, supporting teacher preparation and professional development, enhancing educational access, and streamlining educational planning, management, and administration including processes related to admissions, attendance, assessments, etc.

In future, universities will offer Masters programmes and Ph.D in core areas like Machine Learning as well as in multidisciplinary fields “AI + X” and professional areas like health care, agriculture, and law. Moreover, higher education

institutions will play an active role in conducting research of disruptive technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) 3D/7D Virtual Reality.

5.4. Online and Digital Education will be the future mode of education

During pandemic times the NEP 2020 has recognized the advantages of technology use in the teaching learning process and at the same time the policy has also recognized the probable risks and dangers of technology use. The benefits of technology can be reaped by eliminating the digital divide. Teachers need suitable training in order to be effective online teachers. Similarly, there are numerous problems like network and power disruptions, unethical practices etc. of conducting online examination. For ensuring equitable use of technology through online and digital platform the policy recommends the following initiatives:

i) Digital infrastructure: The need of the hour according to NEP is to invest and create an open and public digital infrastructure for the education sector that can be used by multiple platforms considering the diversity, complexity, scale and device penetration of India. It will ensure that technology-based solutions are not getting outdated due to rapid advances in technology.

ii) Online teaching platform and tools: E-learning platforms such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, for the purpose of monitoring the progress of students will be extended to teachers. Holding online classes in the pandemic situation is really a necessity at this moment.

iii) Pilot studies for online education: As per NEP 2020, agencies like NETF, CIET, NIOS, IGNOU, IITs, NITs,

etc., will conduct Pilot studies to evaluate the benefits of integrating education with online education. They will study the areas like student device addiction, most preferred formats of e-content, etc. After pilot studies the agencies will publicly communicate the results for its continuous improvement.

iv) Blended models of learning: No one can ignore that the importance of on-line education is immense during the pandemic situation but at the same time the face-to-face in-person learning cannot be ignored. For this purpose, effective blended models need to be identified for future teaching-learning process. Keeping in mind these factors recently the Central Government has announced that 60% offline classes and 40% online classes will be held when the higher education institution opens.

v) Virtual Labs: To ensure that all students have equal access to quality practical and hands-on experiment-based learning, the existing e-learning platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and SWAYAMPRAKHA will also be leveraged for creating virtual labs.

vi) Laying down standards: Appropriate bodies including NETF will set up standards regarding content, technology and pedagogy for online/digital teaching-learning as dependence on online/digital education increases with the passage of time. These standards will help to formulate guidelines relating to e-learning by States, Boards, schools and school complexes, higher education institutions etc.

5.5. Challenges offered by Higher Education Policy, 2020 - Analysis and Interpretation

Presently the higher education system faces the following challenges in India according to NEP 2020 which is expected

to be solved by the current policy of 2020:

i) Lack of motivation in faculty members in terms of teaching, research, and service: The objective of NEP 2020 is to improve the quality of the faculty and only by improving the quality of the teacher the goals of higher education can be achieved. Towards this end, various initiatives have been taken by the government to systematize recruitment and career advancement process. Moreover, the compensation of the permanent faculties has been enhanced as per 7th Pay Commission recommendations. Besides for the professional development of the faculties various measures have been taken by the government time to time. In spite of all these measures faculty motivation in terms of teaching, research, and service is low compared to the standard in higher education institutions. The following initiatives have been recommended by the policy in order to develop motivated, best and capable faculties in higher education institutions:

- (a) Ensuring basic infrastructural facilities:** Basic infrastructural facilities like, blackboards, offices, teaching supplies, clean drinking water, clean working toilets, libraries, labs, and pleasant classroom spaces and campuses will be ensured for all higher education institutions as per NEP 2020. For better learning experience all the classrooms shall have access to the latest educational technology.
- (b) Student teacher ration must be lowered and not excessive duty hours:** Lower student teacher ration and not excessive duty hours gives opportunity to a teacher to properly interact with his students. This will also encourage them to involve in research activities and university related work.

- (c) Not transferable to other institutions:** A faculty must be appointed for a particular institution and he/she must not be transferred to other institutions. Otherwise they cannot develop attachment with the institutions and also, they will not be committed to the institutions as well towards the society. On the other hand, if the faculties are frequently transferred across the institutions then they will not be able to develop any loyalty for the institutions as well for the society and they will feel stressed.
- (d) Freedom of Work:** Within the approved framework the faculties must be given freedom to design their own curricular and pedagogical approaches. They must enjoy completed freedom in selection of books and reading materials, assignments and assessments. They can be motivated for outstanding creative work by empowering them to conduct innovative teaching, research, and service.
- (e) Incentives through rewards:** A faculty who performs better and show his excellence will be incentivized on the basis of various reward promotions, recognitions, and movement into institutional leadership. But a faculty who is not performing according to the norm will be held accountable for non-performance.
- (f) More autonomous institutions:** The new education policy is in favour of giving more autonomy to the institutions to drive towards excellence. For achieving this, higher education institutions will have transparent selection processes and criteria for the appointment of faculty members. In order to ensure excellence a ‘tenure-track’ i.e., suitable probation period for the

new faculty members shall be put in place. There must be a provision for fast-track promotion for those faculties whose contribution and research impact will be commendable.

(g) Performance Measurement: Performance appraisal of the faculties must be based on several parameters for the purpose of calculating the tenure of service for confirmed employees after promotion, salary increase etc. It also includes peer and student feedback, innovations in teaching and pedagogy, quality and impact of research, professional development activities and contribution to the institution and society at large.

ii) Less importance on cognitive skills: The current higher education system gives less importance on the development of cognitive skills like read, think, learn, reason, remember and pay attention and learning outcomes of the students which is very much essential for any students for future success and achievement. But the NEP 2020 put much emphasis on cognitive skills for the betterment of the students.

iii) To restrain commercialization of education: The new education policy aims to combat and stop commercialization of higher education. All educational institutions dealing with higher education will face the same standards of audit and transparent public disclosure (i.e. in terms of financial matters with recourse to grievance-handling mechanisms to the general public) as ‘a non-profit seeking organization.’ Any kind of surplus generated by higher education institutions will be reinvested in education sector. All financial matters will be disclosed to the public and any grievance of the public will be taken care of by the grievance-handling cell. Besides NAC which is responsible for accreditation of higher

education institutions will provide a complementary check on the commercialization of higher education system and it will be one of the key dimensions of its regulatory objective of National Higher Education Regulatory Committee (NHERC).

iv) Self-governing degree-granting institutions/clusters:

The vision of NEP to convert all higher education institutions into self-governing degree-granting institutions within next 15 years on the basis of accreditation parameters of autonomy, self-governance, quality and on the basis of Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) is a difficult proposition to achieve.

v) Regulatory system is not effective: The University Grants Commission (UGC) acts as the overall regulatory body of higher education system in India. Higher education institutions in India include universities, colleges, and other institutions. Universities award their own degrees, colleges' award degrees through their affiliating universities. The college offers the courses. In the supply chain of Higher Education, university, college and course form the key links and there are entry and exit barriers at each level. The courses which are run at college or university level are regulated by professional councils such as All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Medical Council of India (MCI) and the Bar Council India (BCI). Among other things they also manage professional courses. Within this set up it is difficult for private institutions to enter and operate in this sector. Presently there are two accrediting institutions – namely National Board of Accreditation (NBA) established by AICTE and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) established by UGC. All higher education institutions are required to be accredited by an accreditation agency as per UGC Regulations, 2012. The regulatory challenges of current setup which can be rectified with NEP 2020 are discussed below:

- (a) Outdated requirements:** So far as the requirements in term of qualification of faculty or channel of delivery or library norms is concerned, the current regulatory set up does not serve the purpose rather than adding to the costs significantly.
 - (b) Backlog in accreditation:** In higher education system there are only two accreditation agencies responsible for processing applications. But as their capacity is limited therefore it results in large backlogs in accreditation of many colleges and universities.
 - (c) Overlapping regulations:** Another problem which arises with the current regulatory system is that in case of opening a new college or university or offering a course or getting accreditation from accrediting agency involves overlapping regulations. It increases cost of entering and operating into the sector and wastes time also.
 - (d) Profit organizations are not allowed in this sector:** The regulatory system demands high capital requirement, endowment funds to meet land norms. The problem gets further aggravated when the restriction of only a Society or Trust or Section 25 company has been allowed as a sponsoring agency i.e. profit seeking organizations cannot finance such ventures.
- vi) Admission to M. Phil programme will be discontinued:** This is another challenge in the implementation of NEP 2020 because no state is going to accept this proposal because M. Phil as a qualification is in existence for last few decades and students really learn the research methodology and statistical software in true sense. So if this proposal is implemented then large number of students will be deprived

of this opportunity which is not desirable. All the courses at undergraduate, postgraduate and Ph.D levels will now become interdisciplinary.

vii) Limited access and teaching in local languages:

Another challenge of the present higher education system is that number of higher education institutions in the socio-economically disadvantaged areas are very limited and in those institutions, teaching is done in local languages. But the NEP contemplates to open higher educational institutions in the backward regions and in both English and regional languages.

viii) Limited teacher and institutional autonomy: Presently there are limited teachers in colleges and universities. The classes are mainly taken by guest faculties in various departments of the colleges and universities. These guest faculties try their level best but lack motivation due to very low remuneration. Moreover, the colleges and universities are not autonomous and as a result they cannot take any decision independently without the permission of state government or central government which impairs their quality, innovation, research, prestige and leadership of the institutions.

ix) Suboptimal governance and leadership of Higher Education Institutions: A culture of excellence and innovation in higher education institutions can be created only through effective governance and leadership. But the current governance and leadership of higher education institutions does not promote this at all. In a phased manner all higher education institutions should be given graded accreditation and graded autonomy so that they become independent self-governing institutions pursuing innovation and excellence. The NEP 2020 ensures that all measures will be taken within

2030 so that all higher education institutions are self-governing institutions which will pursue innovation and excellence in order to ensure leadership of highest quality and a culture of excellence in all institutions. Within 2030 all higher education institutions will be headed by Board of Governors (BoG) consisting of highly dedicated and competent individuals and they will be empowered to run the institutions from external interference, appoint all faculty members and can take decision regarding governance.

x) Low standards of undergraduate education due to large number of affiliating colleges: Another problem which is very common with the most of the universities is that they have large number of affiliating colleges under them. They have no control over those colleges regarding the number of students taking admission, evaluation of answer scripts, coordination with the college teachers, improperly structured curriculum which all leads to low standard of under graduate education in under graduate colleges.

xi) Separate disciplines, early specialization and streaming students into narrow areas of study: The current system of education in the higher education does not promote innovation, leadership and versatility among the students because a student choose a particular discipline, opt for specialization just completing the first semester and forced into different areas where they study only few things which does not develop their personality and skills.

6. Conclusion

NEP 2020 will paves the way of social and academic equality, value orientation and independent society. The modifications which are currently required in the Indian education can be brought about only by implementing NEP 2020. The policy

has maintained a delicate balance between the traditions and the interdisciplinary approach considering the need of the 21st century. NEP is a progressive and ambitious policy which has the required potential to revamp the skills of the youth of our country and has all the right tools which are needed to be competitive in the global level. The recently announced NEP sets out a vision to transform higher education by the year 2030. This policy was not yet submitted to Parliament for its approval. So, it is a policy but not a law. The implementation of this policy depends on all state governments' approval because education is concurrent subject under the constitution. But the current NEP 2020 wants to destroy the federal structure by implementing the policy which mostly contains central government plans and thinking and the state governments are not at all consulted before giving the proposals. So the implementation will be a difficult task. NEP is clear about its destination but it is not clear from the NEP how to reach there and how long it will take to reach there. Huge funds are required for the implementation of this policy. Now in the pandemic situation some states consider that it is not the right time to discuss about this policy and during the Covid-19 situation it will be difficult to allocate funds for its implementation. So the policy is a distant dream and there are conflicting views about the NEP 2020. The conflicting views about the new National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) is that it has divided people into camps of supporters and critics. The policy has widened inequalities through provisions such as choice, flexibility, vocational education, multiple exits, abolishing M.Phil degree, promoting privatisation, undermining the Right to Education Act and most importantly, replacing constitutional values. Moreover the Government is desperately trying to implement this policy very fast without meaningfully engaging with the concerns raised.

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