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Editorial Note

Research is a crucial component in our lives that permeates through the realms of higher education. It aids in the advancement of knowledge, improved pedagogy, the enhancement of institutional reputation, and promotes funding which are crucial to the overall growth of an institution. Within the experience of empirical studies, the researcher, be it student or teacher, finds better scope to hone a wide spectrum of skills. The immense benefits of a consistent and vibrant research environment are the impetus behind the publication of the annual multidisciplinary Dimapur Government College Journal.

Providing a wide platform for the avid scholar, this issue contains twelve papers ranging from topics as diverse as food crops, pre-colonial Naga society, issues of identity, midwives, gender, role of media, different aspects of literature, sexual health of students and the implementation of the NEP 2020 and FYUGP. They have been written by writers across academia. We are confident that readers will find these papers relevant, thought-provoking and practical.

The papers have been thoroughly assessed by qualified reviewers for whose contributions the editorial board remains grateful.

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2. IMPLEMENTATION OF NEP 2020 IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A REVIEW

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Abstract

The New Education Policy 2020 envisages major overhauling of higher education sector in the country. It essentially aims to transform the higher education landscape by making a paradigm shift in its overall content, structure and governance. NEP has been quite contentious ever since it was put in public domain. The subsequent roll out of NEP related activities throughout the country has seen more concerns and challenges emerging. The paper reviews the challenges facing the realistic implementation of NEP from the lens of its provisions relating to higher education. The challenges identified include federal strains and political polarization over NEP, structural and financial resource constraints, lack of institutional capacity and preparedness including faculty shortage, digital education and digital divide, and issues arising out of multiple entry and exit. Based on data collected from secondary sources, a structural approach is adopted to review these challenges. The paper reiterates that there is an urgent need for the government and policy makers to identify and address the grey areas of the policy and adopt effective implementation measures. It concludes that effective implementation of NEP would depend decisively upon consensus and cooperation among all stakeholders, proper implementation plan, sufficient financial management, infrastructural development, and strengthening the principle of federalism and of the institutional capacity of higher education institutions.

Keywords: NEP 2020, higher education, implementation, challenges

INTRODUCTION

New Education Policy 2020, (hereafter 'NEP') is India's first educational policy of the 21st century which was rolled out in July 2020. It outlines a new and broad vision of India's education system aligned with the aspirational goals of the 21st century. It aspires to make India into a world knowledge superpower. NEP provides a comprehensive framework for education from primary to higher education. It revamps all aspects of the education structure, including regulation and governance. In brief, NEP makes a paradigm shift in India's education policy and strives to empower the youth of the country with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead the country into the future confidently.

NEP envisages major changes for the higher education sector. It essentially transforms the higher education landscape in the country by making a paradigm shift in its overall content, structure and governance. NEP has significant implications for higher education system in the country. The policy calls for consolidation and institutional restructuring of higher education institutions. It restructures the architecture of higher education to have only three kinds of institutions - research intensive universities, teaching intensive universities and autonomous degree granting colleges.

Accordingly, the policy recommends granting graded autonomy to colleges while allowing them to phase out of university affiliation in the next 15 years.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is aimed to be increased to 50% by 2035. The policy envisages multiple entry-exit options in undergraduate programs with appropriate certification - a certificate after one year, a diploma after two years, a degree after three years, and an honours, and honours with research after four years. Holistic and multi-disciplinary under graduate education is emphasised, allowing students to choose subjects from different streams like science, arts, humanities, social sciences, and commerce. An Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) is to be established for digitally storing academic credits earned by students. Public investment in education sector is proposed to be enhanced to 6% of GDP. Online and digital education is envisaged to accelerate student enrolment in higher education and make quality education accessible to all. Vocational and skill education is also envisaged. NEP calls for internationalisation of higher education, a major force gaining momentum at present.

Methodology and Delimitation

The paper is a descriptive review study based on data collected from secondary sources. It adopts a structural approach to review the challenges facing the NEP, 2020 implementation in higher education sector. Other

challenges posed from ideological and identity politics perspectives are not considered in depth. The challenges identified, therefore, are structural, which constitutes a limitation of the paper.

NEP: The Issues and Challenges

Ever since NEP was put in public domain, it has met with strong opposition and challenges. Several pressing issues and challenges have emerged in the implementation of the policy. As NEP related activities began to roll out throughout the country, more concerns and challenges have emerged not only with the content of the policy, but also in the way in which the policy is implemented. These challenges range from opposition to the policy by political parties for political gains, strains and pulls of federal relations, opposition from stakeholders, structural and financial resource constraints, lack of institutional capacity and preparedness, shortage of manpower and infrastructure, lack of comprehensive guidelines for implementation, etc. A broad consensus among stakeholders over the policy is still elusive and some states are yet to come on board with some of the policy's provisions. NEP definitely has grey areas which need to be addressed if the policy is to be taken towards its desired goals.

Federal Strains and Political Polarization

The opposition to NEP by various stakeholders, including the Left and the opposition political parties,

exposes political polarization over the policy as well as strains in centre-state relations. It is criticised that NEP centralizes overarching power in the hands of the central government by robbing the states of their constitutional rights, and imposing a centralised structure of authority in the education system.In this way, NEP violates the very essence of Indian federalism (Gupta, 2021; Sahoo, 2020; Biswajit, 2020). The manner in which NEP was drafted and rolled out points to strong centralizing tendencies. Under India's federal arrangement, education falls under the Concurrent List. This means that both the centre and the states have joint responsibility over it. However, there is opacity in the manner in which the policy was developed and adopted. Stakeholders including states were not consulted, nor was the draft policy tabled on the Parliament for discussion (Saha, 2023, p.1). Lack of consultation and forcibly thrusting NEP on the states amounts to impinging on their autonomy, which is a deviation from the federal principles. Another aspect that points to the centralising tendency of the policy is the proposal for setting up of centralised regulatory authorities like Higher Education Commission of India and National Testing Agency to translate the broad goals of NEP (Sahoo, 2020). Concerns are being raised that such measures may eventually lead to an extensive disempowerment of the Indian states in the sphere of education.

Political parties opposed to the NEP, in particular the left parties, criticize it as one that seeks greater centralization,

communalization and commercialization, and a unilateral drive to destroy the Indian education system (Bhattacharya, 2020; CPI (M), 2023; Deccan Herald, July 30, 2020; *Times of India,* July 29, 2020). Left parties like CPI (M) and CPI (ML) point out that the NEP was formulated by the central government by passing the Parliament, and that the states were not taken into confidence. This impinges on the autonomy of states and undermines the spirit of federalism. Similarly, the imposition of three-language formula undermines the autonomy of states, potentially weakening the linguistic character of the Indian states. The ideological and policy-driven resistance of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu is a case in point. In the name of restructuring and new content creation (as seen in the communalisation of textbooks, curriculum and institutions), NEP, it is criticised, prepares the ground for 'saffronisation' of education. The move towards creating education markets by opening the floodgates for privatised and commercialised education is seen as a deviation from the state's welfarist agenda of providing free education of an equitable standard for all.

The chorus of stakeholders' opposition to NEP has come from opposition-ruled states. Karnataka, which became the first state in the country to implement the policy in 2021, announced the decision to scrap it from the academic session 2024. The DMK government in Tamil Nadu rejected NEP and has come out with its own educational policy. This was seen from some quarters as a concerted push against the policies of BJP government at

the centre (Sivapriyam, 2022). The Kerala government has contended that NEP encroaches and violates the state's rights in the domain of education (Dev, 2023). A plausible scenario that merits attention is the likely outcome of some states having their separate education policies. This may not go down well in terms of uniformity in overhauling and reforming the education sector in the country, and may defeat the very purpose of NEP to provide equitable access and high-quality education to all.

Another challenge pointing to political polarization over NEP is the fund sharing model stipulated under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), a central funding scheme aimed at enhancing the accessibility, equity and quality of higher education in the country (Ministry of Education, 2023, p.45). For availing fund under PM-USHA, states are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Union Education Ministry, mandating the signatory states to implement NEP and adopt contentious academic criterions under NEP. This aspect, it is contented, makes the PM-USHA scheme exclusivist (*The Hindu*, August 15, 2023). Further, some opposition-ruled states have reservations about the fund sharing model (60:40 split between the centre and states respectively).Given the contention that these states have no additional fund for NEP reforms, it creates a dual financial burden for them (Jigeesh, 2023b). Thus, these states stand to be potentially side-lined.

While the PM-USHA has come in as a timely intervention for fund-crunch states like Nagaland to overhaul its higher education sector, the opposition to the scheme from mostly opposition-ruled states on the ground of fund sharing formula only points to sharpening political polarisation over NEP and the growing strains in centre-state relations in recent years. For the ruling dispensation at the centre, the funding criteria under PM-USHA has come as a way to bulldoze NEP through and upon the states. It is to be noted that bulldozing around minority governments is nothing new in competitive politics in India; it has been a common occurrence during different regimes of government. As it is, the NEP has become a tool for political parties to buttress their political agendas. Divergence on the lines of political ideology and lack of cohesion among political parties vis-à-vis NEP have emerged as bottlenecks for effective implementation of the policy.

Raising Investment to 6% GDP

NEP calls for raising public spending on education to 6% of GDP. However, considering that the country has not been able to fulfil similar goals as envisaged by earlier education policies, the goal seems to be a daunting task (Jayal, 2020). In the Union budget 2023, Rs. 44, 904.62 crore was earmarked for higher education out of Rs. 1,12,899 crores that was allocated to education sector. An increase by 8% from 2022, it was the highest ever allocation for higher education (ETB, 2023**).** This budget outlay was

driven by NEP goals. However, the overall expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP remained stagnant at only 2.9% (ETB, 2023). This percentage significantly falls short of the NEP's ambition of allocating 6% of GDP to education sector.Besides,NEP is silent on the roadmap as to how such enormous sums of financial resources can be augmented (Sahoo, 2020). Given the situation, it is doubtful if the ambitious goal of pushing up public investment in education to 6% GDP can be achieved in the foreseeable future. The ambitious goals that NEP envisages cannot be realised without building up strong public finances and a robust financial sector by both the centre and the states.

Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit (MEME)

NEP envisages multiple entry and multiple exit option for students in undergraduate programs with appropriate certification - a certificate after one year, a diploma after two years, a degree after three years, and an honours, and honours with research after four years. Objections and concerns about the option have been raised by academic stakeholders. Apart from practical implementing issues like unpredictability of the number of students entering and exiting in a particular year and management issues due to uneven geographical distribution of higher educational institutions (Jigeesh, 2023a), concerns have been raised that MEME will cause students to quit without completing their education, triggering more drop-out rates in the higher education system. This may legitimise

"drop-out" particularly among the students from deprived groups (Malish, 2023).The MEME option, as proposed by NEP, may therefore not play out effectively in the country. This was recognised by the Parliamentary Committee on Education, which took cognizance of the fact that higher education institutions would face issues and difficulties in implementing the MEME option (Jigeesh, 2023a). The recommendation by the committee to have wider consultations with stakeholders and to develop comprehensive guidelines and a well-defined framework for MEME option is a welcome step in the right direction.

Digital Education and Digital Divide

Digitisation of education is emphasized for attainment of 50% GER in higher education as envisaged in NEP. Digitisation is expected to facilitate realisation of three major thrust areas of NEP, viz., access, equity and quality. However, this focus seems to overlook the reality of glaring digital divide prevailing in the country, and other empowering means of digital education.

To substantiate the issue of digital divide prevailing in the country, some crucial findings merit attention here. As per the survey on Household Social Consumption on Education in India (2017-2018) conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), 23.4% of urban household possessed computers compared to only 4.4% in rural households. (NSO, 2020, p. 240). The survey estimated that 23.8% of the households in the country had internet access,the proportion of which was 14.9% among rural

households and 42% among urban households. It is also reported that only about 9 per cent of students enrolled in any course had access to a computer with internet and 25 per cent of enrolled students had access to the internet through any kind of devices (Oxfam India, 2022, p. 25). Across the rural-urban divide, it is mainly students from the economically weaker sections who face the problem of poor access to digital infrastructure. This would translate into widening educational inequalities among learners, with digital have-nots being pushed into the periphery of the education system. Consequently, there will be increase in inequity in educational outcomes. Under the prevailing conditions of digital divide, online education and digitisation becomes unviable.

The problem of digital divide is further compounded by the issue of uninterrupted supply of electricity.Electricity is an empowering means on which digital education heavily relies. India is getting closer to being fully electrified, with 97% of the households being electrified (Agrawal, et al.,2020, p.x). However, 2.4% of households remain unelectrified, with most of these household concentrated in rural areas (Agrawal, et al., 2020, p.x). Besides, in terms of supply, the country faces the issue of providing better quality electricity. According to a national survey conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development under Mission Antyodaya in 2017-18, about 16% of India's households receive one to eight hours of electricity, 33% receive nine to twelve hours of electricity daily, and only about 47% receive more than twelve hours a day (Kundu,

2020). 64% rural households and 40% urban households face power cuts at least once a day. The problem of uninterrupted electricity supply is particularly prevalent in rural areas. Lack of access to uninterrupted supply of electricity stands to prevent students, particularly from the rural and socio-economic disadvantaged community, to efficiently operate the digital devices.

Thus, digital divide and lack of uninterrupted electricity supply are glaring problems facing the country at present. While digitization of education can be an opportunity, it can equally be a challenge. Without fixing the twin issues of the existing digital divide and lack of access to other empowering means of digital education prevalent in the country, expanding GER digitally to augment student flexibility may be difficult to sustain, and meaningful outcomes of the NEP efforts may be far-fetched.

Institutional Capacity: Shortage of Faculty

A major problem that undermines the institutional capacity of higher education institutions in the country is the existence of large number of faculty vacancies, and the shortage of qualified, permanent teachers. It is pointed out that NEP ignores many structural problems that plagues higher education, including the large number of faculty vacancies (Jayal, 2020). It is estimated that there is a 35% faculty shortage in India's higher education sector(Dhillon, 2021, p.1105).In around 45 central universities, there is a shortage of 6549 teachers (Agrawal, 2022). Colleges affiliated to universities are no

better in this aspect. Funding shortage is identified as a critical issue related to faculty shortage. Due to lack of funds, state governments do not create or sanction new posts, and even when vacancies exist, they are kept vacant (Pushkar,2023).

Faculty strength may vary significantly across different states and institutions. But the fact remains that many higher education institutions in the country struggle with shortage of qualified teachers. With the GER target of 50% by 2035 as envisaged by NEP, the requirement of teachers is likely to rise. Faculty shortage has emerged as a major challenge to implement NEP for many universities and colleges in the country. In the light of this, robust interventionist methods of recruitment need to be adopted by the government at all levels to address the problem of faculty shortage in universities and colleges.

Conclusion

NEP is a visionary document with the potential of revolutionizing the Indian education sector. Any system in transition will always have its unique challenges, and implementation of NEP to transform the higher education sector is no exception, with glaring challenges that hinder universal readiness of the system to embrace change. To tide over the challenges, it is imperative for all the stakeholders to act in a sustained collective manner. There is urgent need for the government and policy makers to identify and tackle the grey areas of the policy and adopt effective implementation measures

and policy frameworks to address the shortcomings and emerging challenges. All stakeholders, particularly the dissenting states, need to be taken on board. In particular, the central government need to strategicallyhold discussions with dissenting states and negotiate better terms with them, respecting the essence of federalism and decentralisation. Furthermore, it is expected of the opposition political parties to act with political maturity and refrain from opposing the policy just for buttressing their political agendas.

For augmenting the financial needs of higher education institutions, the government needs to robustly work towards achieving the target of 6% GDP spending. The needs of the universities and colleges should be addressed, particularly the teacher vacancy issue, keeping in view the requirements of NEP. Infrastructural development (both digital and physical) of universities and colleges should be given a priority. Addressing these issues within a stipulated timeline or perhaps in mission mode will certainly go a long way in rescuing the NEP caravan.For now, the policy is thrown at the universities and colleges to roll out on an experiential basis. It is only hoped that the NEP will shape out into a credible policy and go on to realise its vision and goals.

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