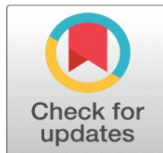


NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020: PROMISES AND PROSPECTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) which is the third policy document on education since independence is based on the objective of restructuring/ revamping the education system so that it can act as a catalyst for laying down the foundations/ roadmap of a new India/ Vikshit Bharat. Approved by the cabinet/ government of India on 29th July 2020 it aims at giving a big thrust/ boost to higher education in India by adopting progressive/ reformatory path of bringing about required qualitative changes not only in the existing model of education but the system of governance as well. In fact this visionary document is an ambitious manifesto of scaling the heights of global leadership. Having a firm understanding of the contemporary fast evolving socio-economic situation and the potential for addressing the possible challenges of the future it can transform India into a global hub of education by 2030 provided the implementation matches the prescribed principles. The researcher is primarily focused on the secondary sources/ review of available / existing literature which are used to explain, examine and evaluate the problems and prospects of NEP 2020 in a descriptive manner.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary, Governance, Progressive, Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has always been a critical component for ensuring progress of any country. In the fast changing contemporary globalised world it has become increasingly important for any country to develop and design its system of education in such a manner that it has potential to enlarge and expand beyond its borders without compromising its autonomy. The basic premise of the NEP 2020 is based upon the preamble's conceptualisation of creating a conducive socio-economic ecology devoid of any discrimination which may ultimately act as an active agent of social change. Moreover, the guiding philosophy of the NEP 2020 is not only to protect and promote the traditions of Indian knowledge system but to reclaim the lost glory of academic leadership / Vishvaguru.

Genealogically speaking it is the third policy document on national education of post-colonial India ; first in the twenty first century. The first NEP was adopted and implemented in 1968 and the second in 1986. The NEP 2020 is translation/ fulfilment of the electoral promise made by the BJP during the general elections of 2014 wherein its manifesto clearly stated that it would revolutionise/ overhaul the education system. In order to fulfill its promise the BJP led NDA government swung into action and constituted a committee in January 2015 under T.S.R.Subramanian. It was

followed by NEP proposal by the committee of experts headed by K. Kasturirangan which submitted its report in June 2017 which was finally given a shape of draft and submitted to the Ministry in 2019. It was followed by release of the draft proposal in public domain for wider feedback. Subsequently based on the feedback of the stakeholders and public at large 484 pages draft of NEP 2020 was introduced on July 29, 2020 by Ministry of Human Resource Development. The vision document has explicitly explained the aims and objectives of the National Education Policy: "National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India-centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all." (Goel, 2020, p15).

This policy document talks about five integrated pillars of continuous learning without any restrictions: accessibility, affordability equity, quality, and accountability (Chandra, 2021). Based on the requirements of changing times and circumstances it attempts at achieving the desired goals of the people who are interested in upgrading their information and skills as per the demands of industry and the society. It also at meeting the target of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 which calls for high quality education embedded with opportunities for life long learning which in turn may act as a means to promote and provide Human Resources as per the demands of market. (Inamdar & Praveen). It also aims at structural reforms at every stage of educational system; elementary, secondary and higher education so that the upcoming generation is well equipped to compete globally in the evolving digitally integrated world economy (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). Emphasising clearly that this policy intends to bring about radical but sustainable changes in education system it aims at increasing enrolments at every stage within the broader framework of egalitarian principles and international standards. It recommends, therefore, early childhood education, curriculum and pedagogy reforms, de-construction of examination procedures and ensuring preparedness of the teachers for the proposed reforms/ initiatives. (Aithal & Aithal 2019).

No doubt all the three stages of education play important role in shaping the future of an individual as well as the country but the higher education is considered the most critical component in ensuring the development in the desired direction particularly in a developing country. Having realised this aspect of higher education in the fast changing world the NEP 2020 has focused on two core components of higher education; qualitative improvement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and developing India as a hub for international education (Das, 2022). As per the approved blueprint of NEP 2020 the higher education will provide appropriate space for a flexible curriculum within the framework of interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary approach which allows multiple exit routes/ points in a four year undergraduate programme. Moreover, it will help in accelerating the speed of research and innovation, boost faculty support and promote ethos of globalisation (Das & Burman, 2023). In order to bring about structurally sustainable fundamental changes it relies upon multidisciplinary universities and colleges, revamping curriculum along with pedagogy and evaluation, support for enhanced learning outcomes for students, creating a Research Foundation at National level to promote and facilitate peer reviewed research etc.

The above prescription of NEP 2020 aims at removing the bottlenecks faced by the existing system of higher education like enforced separation of qualifications, early specialisation, restricted/ fixed areas of research at most of the universities. Moreover, it has not been able to develop a robust mechanism of competitive peer-reviewed research funding. The existing system also suffers due to large affiliating universities which has proved to be a hindrance in providing quality education particularly at undergraduate levels. The existing system neither promoted multidisciplinary courses nor produced innovative individuals. Compared to international standards the gross enrolment ratio was also significantly low.

It was argued by the expert committee, therefore, that holistic and multidisciplinary education should become the new normal of higher education whereby efforts would be made to develop and improve overall human capabilities like mental, social-cultural, emotional, moral and physical. It required that a comprehensive and integrated approach should be adopted across all the disciplines/ streams of higher education. It is possible through holistic approach which consists of appropriate curriculum, interactive/ engaging pedagogy, continuous assessment and required support for the students.

The remedial/ recourse recommended by the committee consists of structural/ fundamental changes at every level- institutional to students progression mechanism. Accordingly it is recommended that in place of multiple regulatory authorities/institutions there should be single regulatory agency- Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). Similarly in place of two institutional certification boards- NAAC and NBA- there should be only one agency called National Certification Council (NAC). In the same manner research and innovation related funding should be taken care of by an agency named National Research Foundation. As far as numerical strengths of students is concerned it recommends that by 2040 each campus of higher education must have 3000 students. These higher education institutions should focus completely either on teaching or research. The colleges may have options and opportunities to become autonomous by fulfilling the criteria for the same. The policy document also lays emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary education with implementation of research at the undergraduate level itself. Another important point is to ensure establishment of Academic Bank of credits at national level so that option of multiple entry and exit becomes possible. Strengthening digital platforms of learning is an integral and important aspect of this policy. It advises, therefore, to encourage opening of digital platforms or strengthening/ upgrading of existing platforms for online learning as well as modernising the library system. (NEP 2020). The teaching methods would become student centric rather than existing teacher centric. The assessment and evaluation process would not be based on end semester exams rather it would focus on continuous assessment system. It also provides the mechanism to give due weightage and equivalence to students of foreign universities so that students can have the opportunity to get degree by attending two universities; domestic as well as foreign. It has also been made crystal clear that there would be no discrimination between government funded/ aided and private institutions while dealing with proposed for research grants as it would follow nothing but merit. One of the aims of this policy is to provide world class education by the top most universities of the world by giving these universities an opportunity to open their campus in the Indian soil as this would provide opportunity to millions of students for getting access to their systems of education at their doorstep without much expenditure and hardships. In fact by providing such opportunities to foreign universities through academic collaborations the native institutions may get opportunity to design and develop their academic curriculum in alignment with international pedagogy and offer a diverse set of subjects and specialisations to the students.

The critics, however, are of the opinion that the NEP 2020 may have a hidden agenda of promoting/ pursuing the policies of GATT doctored policy of opening the education sector for global investors. In other words this policy has been adopted to give a legitimate boost to privatisation of education. This is evident from the fact that the NEP 2020 talks of encouraging top hundred foreign universities colleges to open their centres/ campuses in India. Moreover the policy is almost silent on the issue of capitation fees charged by the private institutions as these are run by politicians or religious groups with nothing but profit motive. Last but not the least the critics are of the opinion that it does not address the issue of equity and universal access for all as no provision has been made to ensure the right to education particularly for marginalised/ deprived sections of the society.

To sum up, it may be concluded/ argued that the NEP 2020 is a path breaking policy document which aims at bringing about fundamental structural reforms/ changes in the existing/ prevailing system of education in general and higher education in particular. It is an attempt to integrate multiple regulatory frameworks/ institutions into one so that the decision making process becomes uniform and unified which may address the issues of overlapping and conflicting policy initiatives. Moreover, the proposed structure of multidisciplinary course curriculum with multiple opportunities for entry and exit may have far reaching positive implications. Not only that but the idea of modernisation of tools and techniques of instructions and evaluation would provide the necessary edge to make the system globally competitive and help India achieve its objective of reclaiming the status of Vishvaguru.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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