

CHANGING DIMENSION OF EDUCATION – A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY – 2020

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Abstract of the Paper

While NEP 2020 aims for many much-needed positive changes, the backdoor passing of the bill and the possibility of amplifying existing fault lines in Indian society needs to be looked into. The policy will seemingly increase the economic divide in a country that is already divided by religion, caste, gender, and wealth. It makes it nearly impossible for disadvantaged classes to climb up the social ladder. The NEP supposedly envisages decolonizing young Indian mind; however, in reality could that translate to the saffronisation of education? Earlier this year crucial topics for students, such as democratic rights, challenges to democracy, citizenship, food security, gender, religion, caste, and secularism were dropped from the syllabus. Are all of these moves stepping stones to achieve saffronisation? In this scenario holistic, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, overall learning could possibly be a front to cover all the above aspects. It will take years before the policy goes into full swing and only then will these complexities become apparent. The method of implementation will determine its successes and failures. The flaws in this policy need to be addressed with deliberation through proper code of conduct to reduce the current shortfalls. The Committee working on the policy has succinctly identified the role of higher education as ‘promoting human as well as societal wellbeing and developing India as envisioned in its Constitution—a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured and humane nation, upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all.’

Key words- *Effective Learning, Holistic Approach, Discussion and Analysis Approach, Effective Teaching Profession, and Knowledge Resource.*

Statement of the Problem

National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) envisions a massive transformation in education through– “an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant

knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower.” The NEP 2020 is founded on the five guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability. It will prepare our youth to meet the diverse national and global challenges of the present and the future.

In school education, the National Education Policy 2020 stresses on the core values and principle that education must develop not only the cognitive skills, that is, – both ‘foundational skills’ of literacy and numeracy and ‘higher-order’ skills such as critical thinking and problem solving – but also, social and emotional skills - also referred to as ‘soft skills’ -including cultural awareness and empathy, perseverance and grit, teamwork, leadership, communication, among others. The Policy aims and aspires to universalize the pre-primary education and provides special emphasis on the attainment of foundational literacy/numeracy in primary school and beyond for all by 2025. It recommends plethora of reforms at all levels of school education which seek to ensure quality of schools, transformation of the curriculum including pedagogy with 5+3+3+4 design covering children in the age group 3-18 years, reform in the current exams and assessment system, strengthening of teacher training, and restructuring the education regulatory framework. It seeks to increase public investment in education, strengthen the use of technology and increase focus on vocational and adult education, among others. It recommends that the curriculum load in each subject should be reduced to its ‘core essential’ content by making space for holistic, discussion and analysis-based learning.

It also proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure, including the school regulation and governance, to create a new system which is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education along with India’s tradition, culture and value system. Technology will be integrated with education through several existing as well as proposed initiatives, including energized text books, high quality e-content for capacity building of teachers and learners, question banks based on learning outcomes, etc. The policy also notes that establishing primary schools in every habitation across the country has helped in increasing access to education. However, it has led to the development of very small schools (having low number of students) which makes it operationally complex to deploy teachers and critical physical resources. Therefore, the Policy recommends that multiple public schools can be brought together to form a school complex or any innovative grouping mechanism for efficient governance. The policy has emphasized upon Quality Education across all stages of School Education. Quality education is not only a life-changing, but also a mind-crafting and character-building experience, that positively impacts on citizenship. Empowered learners not only contribute to

many growing developmental imperatives of the country but also participate in creating a just and equitable society.

In Higher Education, NEP, 2020 provides valuable insights and recommendations on various aspects of education that include moving towards multidisciplinary and holistic education, institutional autonomy, promotion of quality research through establishment of National Research Foundation, continuous professional development of teachers, integration of technology, internationalization of higher education, restructuring of governance and regulatory architecture, multidisciplinary curricula, engaging blended, pedagogy, valid reliable and blended assessment and availability of content in Indian languages. The policy is expected to bring long-lasting positive impact on the education system and making India a global hub of skilled manpower during the 'Amrit Kaal', the next 25 years leading up to Developed India in 2047. Its implementation needs collective efforts of Centre, States, UTs, HEIs, Regulating Agencies / Regulatory Bodies and all other relevant stakeholders.

The last national education policy was created in 1986. During these 34 years, the world has changed in unprecedented ways. Revolutionary alterations in the world's political economy, fuelled by technological developments, have significantly contributed to the dismantling of the barriers of gender, class, caste, culture, geographical distance, and so forth. All this has created a strong sense of aspiration and hope among the people. Rapid economic developments after 1991, the year when India opened economically, have triggered a high demand for knowledge and specialised skills. During the two-and-a-half decades since economic liberalisation, no comprehensive national vision could be conceived to address the gross systemic inadequacies impeding the momentum of an aspirational and restless India.

A Review of NEP 2020

The policy's causes for concern are being debated on all over social media with #RejectNEP2020 trending on twitter. According to the Indian constitution, regulations of different sectors of society are demarcated by three different lists, namely the Union list, the State list, and Concurrent list. As these names suggest, the Union government makes laws on matters in the union list, the state government makes laws on issues under the State list and both the union and state government govern matters under the concurrent list. When laws are to be made on topics under the concurrent list, it is first put up as a draft for a threshold period. This threshold period is to encourage suggestions and discourse from the states or eminent personalities from the

respective field of the draft bill. Education is listed as a concurrent subject. However, the NEP 2020 was bypassed in the parliament, thereby violating the above code of conduct. A new policy introducing such substantial changes must undergo discourse in the parliament. The government bypassed oppositions and objections of various State governments. Could this be a drive to substitute an already broken system of education with a centralized, communalized and commercialized education system?

The English language is not only paramount value for global outreach, but it is also essential in connecting and communicating with people from other states within India. Career building, outsourcing technical support and skills are dominated by western conglomerates where English has utmost importance. In the new scheme, English will only be offered from the secondary level. Children from families who cannot afford to polish their children's English competence will lose out on opportunities. Discontinuing English as the main medium might make fluency in English based on whether you can afford private tutors, thus disadvantaging the lower caste population who see English as a way to escape caste hierarchy. Mainstreaming Sanskrit in India would be synonymous to the west mainstreaming Latin. Biblical Latin is a dead language, similarly, Sanskrit is used by less than 1% of the Indian population. Mainstreaming this ancient language would only be seen as a regressive step. At the time of the 2001 census on bilingualism and trilingualism, the number of English speakers in India was at 125 million and this number ought to have increased since then. The English language is what has given India an edge over a majority of south-east Asia. Even the Chinese government, who until recently only promoted the Chinese medium, is bringing in reforms and introducing the English language in their education system.

Highlights of the New Education Policy

- Except for medical and law colleges, all higher education institutes will be governed by a single regulator.
- Termination of MPhil. courses.
- Application and knowledge-based board examination implemented.
- The same norms will govern both the public and private higher education institutes.
- Teaching in Mother tongue or regionally made compulsory till class 5th.
- Common entrance exams for higher education institutes and universities.
- Core concepts to be given more focus in the school curriculum.
- Vocational education will begin with training from class 6th.

- 10+2 study culture discontinue and new structure of 5+3+3+4 will be followed, subjecting to the respective age group of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years.

Changes Introduced in Higher Education

- **Overall Multidisciplinary Education:**

More flexible options will be available to enter and exit a course, the focus will be emphasized on vocational education, more options to choose subjects will be available, provides broad-based undergraduate education with flexibility in study plans.

The policy provides more options in choosing the subjects, including and focusing more on vocational education, and more flexibility to enter and exit the course with authorized certification. Options to choose the number of years as per their requirement ranging from 1-4 years will be available.

- **Regulations:**

A single and comprehensive coordinating body for all higher education i.e. Higher Education Commission of India will be established, except for medical and legal education. Four independent verticals of HECI:

- The National Council for the Regulation of Higher Education for regulation.
- The General Council of Education for standardization.
- The Council for Higher Education Grants for funding.
- The National Accreditation Council for accreditation.

Institutions not following the norms will be penalized by HECI which will operate through online mode through technology.

- **Teacher Training:**

For teacher training, a new educational framework will be formed by NCTE with NCERT consultation. Teachers will require a minimum B.Ed. degree of 4 years for teaching in any institution by 2030. Actions will be taken on institutions not following the norms against lower quality.

- **Open And Distance Learning:**

GER will be given importance by increasing open and distance learning. Based on credits measures will be taken such as digital repositories, research funding, online

courses, student service improvement for keeping the highest standard of education and quality of education.

- **Online education and digital education:**

Continuous importance is provided in National Education Policy for the promotion of online education in the wake of the COVID outbreak to ensure the proper and best alternative of education mode to students from anywhere to anywhere. Special unit for continuous development of digital content and infrastructure for future goals for e-education for higher education and schools.

- **Vocational Education:**

All types of activity education and coaching are going to be an elementary part of the upper education system, to strengthen the bottom of the scholars for various professions. Associate berth of ten days in a very year also will be provided to the scholars in native vocations in step with the world or region. Autonomous medical, legal, agriculture aims to become multidisciplinary establishments.

- **Financial Education:**

State govt. and center govt. will work together to promote public investment in the education sector aims at increasing GDP to 6% higher.

4-year under graduation program

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UGC has introduced a choice-based credit system to National Education Policy, under this system students will earn credits for each course they opt for during the degree program. Academic Bank of Credit is proposed by National Education Policy where digital credits earned by students for courses they studied will be

deposited. Academic Bank of Credit is expected to have a flexible entry and exit system as well as multidisciplinary in higher education.

Student's deposit of credit should help to move laterally from one institution to another based on credit score. Designating credits to every course would conjointly mean that courses or comes in areas like community engagement and repair, environmental education, sciences, arithmetic, art, sports, and value-based education would shape. This, per the NEP, would go a protracted means in "attainment of a holistic and multidisciplinary education".

CPD opportunities will cover:

Latest pedagogies concerning foundational acquisition & acquirement. Formative & accommodative assessment of learning outcomes, competency-based learning & connected pedagogies. Platforms are developed for lecturers to share ideas/best practices.

Knowledge of India – Tribal, Indigenous, Traditional ways of learning will be covered in the school curriculum. Ancient India's contribution to Modern India will be covered scientifically in the school curriculum. A Course on the Indian Knowledge System will be made available as an elective to the student in secondary education.

Mental and Physical health and well-being of students Weight of school bags will be reduced. Proper Health check-ups, proper counsellors will be provided. Caring culture to be adopted at schools. Healthy meals and well-trained social workers, community involvement into the schooling system to be adopted.

Internationalization of education: India will be promoted as a global study hub with the best and affordable education. Good performing universities will be allowed to set up their campus outside India also and similarly, good universities will be allowed to operate in India.

Indian Sign Language (ISL) A curriculum will be developed for the disabled student to learn through sign language and all the regional and other sign languages will be given importance.

Boarding and girl safety: Free boarding facilities will be developed into the schools where students come from far and if they are economically backward they will be provided with free and safe boarding facility especially girls.

Changing Dimensions of Education

Under the new policy, private and self-governed colleges will receive more autonomy. When these colleges hand out certifications unchecked, corporatism will follow. This will create a situation where higher studies become a privilege only for those who can afford it. A centralized education system will amount to a stepping stone to social exclusion and dilution of the Right to Education Act. The government stated that it is proposing to improve the quality and autonomy of higher education, however, in a completely backward move, it is dismantling the University Grants Commission (UGC) which was a core structural and regulatory body for higher education. This will only accelerate the commodification and centralization of education, which is perilous considering the probability of the ruling party pushing its ideological and capital requirements. This is in fact not the first time such a move was attempted. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government tried to bring in similar reforms but was met with strong opposition. The present education reforms have come into being only as it was passed through the backdoor without the consent of the parliament.

The policy aspires to dismantle this status hierarchy and aims to integrate vocational education with mainstream education. Starting with vocational exposure in the middle and secondary classes, ‘quality vocational education will be integrated smoothly into higher education’. This will ensure that every individual learns at least one vocation and is able to develop a sense of the dignity of labour and respect for various vocations. This will also enable us to tap our demographic dividend and address skill-deficits of the economy. The policy envisions that the ‘development of vocational capacities will go hand in hand with development of ‘academic’ or other capacities.’ Highlighting the equal importance of vocational education and higher learning, the American public intellectual and statesman, John W Gardner had made a seminal point in his book, *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?*: “The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy; neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.” In conclusion, I would like to argue that the New Education Policy, 2020 appears to be truly visionary and comprehensive. Its success, however, lies in its effective implementation. The government will not leave any stone unturned in this national rebuilding project.

What need to be done?

The policy has also been criticised due to the legal complexities surrounding the applicability of two operative policies namely The Right to Education Act, 2009 and the New Education Policy, 2020. Certain provisions such as the age of starting schooling will need to be deliberated upon, in order to resolve any conundrum between the statute and the recently introduced policy in the longer run. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to note that past attempts at parliamentary legislations under the erstwhile regulatory set up have not been successful. The failure can be attributed to the role of regulators and the intended legislative changes being out of alignment, as in the case of Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010, which lapsed; and the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Act, 2018 which remained did not reach the Parliament.

Summing Up

The contours of NEP is expected to revise the regulatory avatar of the Higher Education Commission of India (“HECI”) being set up with a wide role in Indian higher education. The HECI is likely to have four verticals under its umbrella, including: a) National Higher Education Regulatory Council, intended to be a single point regulator for the higher education sector; b) National Accreditation Council, which will deal with accreditation of institutions; c) Higher Education Grants Council, which will be tasked with carrying out funding and financing of higher education; and d) General Education Council, the final vertical, is expected to have a more academic based-role, as it will frame expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes. Foreign universities coming into the country will also fall under the purview of this framework. While the Universities Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education have played a major role in this direction until now, questions pertaining to the role of the UGC and AICTE remain unanswered under the new policy. It is evident that NEP 2020 is provides a fresh canvas to paint on and opens up avenues for home-schooling and foreign universities alike, in India. For the new policy to succeed a combination of a staunch intent to move out of comfortable doldrums and facilitate increased involvement of foreign universities and increased literacy levels is a must. While this objective is expected to see significant regulatory overhaul for its successful implementation, it would lay a successful path ahead for institutions as well as the student community and place India on the map of an educational haven.

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