

The Need for Reform in Higher Education: Insights from NEP-2020

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Abstract

Since India's higher education system is changing significantly, issues with quality, equity, access, and global competitiveness still continue. By focusing a strong emphasis on skill development, research and innovation, transdisciplinary learning, technological integration, and institutional accountability, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers a comprehensive framework to solve these problems. The urgent need for systemic reforms in higher education is examined in this study using NEP-2020 as an outline. Key areas of focus include improved Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), adaptable curricula, teacher empowerment, institutional autonomy, and decentralization of decision-making. In order to make sure significant reform, it also highlights important issues and challenges that hinder effective implementation and provides recommendations for the government, educational institutions, students, and business stakeholders. While successfully implemented, NEP-2020 has the potential to revolutionize India's higher education system into a vibrant, inclusive, and globally successful system that can produce graduates with a broad range of skills and enable India become a knowledge-based nations.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Higher Education Reforms, Issues and Challenges, Stakeholders.

1. Introduction

A long-awaited road map for reforming the nation's educational system has been established by the National Education Policy-2020. With important suggestions to change the focus of Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the reform seeks to change the educational system in India.

It is based on the values of accountability, quality, affordability, equity, and accessibility and was approved in July 2020. Everyone has access to high-quality education because to NEP 2020. It raises the standard for distance learning. It emphasizes early childhood education and care. It encourages an interdisciplinary method of instruction. It suggests using the mother tongue or a regional language for instruction until at least fifth grade. The NEP 2020 is based on five pillars: accountability, quality, affordability, equity, and access. It will get our young people ready for the various national and international issues of today and tomorrow. The primary goals of the 2020 National Education Policy are

to modernize education in India. By offering excellent education to everyone, the National Education Policy aims to create an education system with roots in Indian culture that directly contributes to making India—that is, Bharat—a global knowledge superpower and transforming it sustainably into an inclusive and dynamic knowledge society. A new pedagogical and curriculum restructure of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18 was designed to replace the current 10+2 system in school education. In order to transform India into a global information nation, the National Education Policy 2020 seeks to implement revolutionary changes in both higher and primary education.

On July 29, 2020, the National Education Policy 2020 was adopted by the Union cabinet, which was led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, which was 34 years old, had been replaced by this policy. The NEP will help students improve their skills and knowledge by giving skill-based learning emphasis over conceptual learning. Both teachers and students will be better prepared for the future by NEP 2020, since they will need to improve their teaching strategies and be up to date in their fields of study. India's educational system will undergo a complete transformation with the full implementation of NEP 2020, enabling both teachers and students to improve their skills, competency, and knowledge.

NEP-2020: Aims and Curricular Area of Higher Education

The NEP-2020 policy is forward-thinking and student-centered, offering students considerable autonomy in terms of choosing their courses and subjects, choosing from a variety of universities, and determining how quickly they can finish a degree. The policy places a strong emphasis on reestablishing India as a "Vishwa guru" by promoting it as a top study destination offering high-quality education at a reasonable price. Making higher education more transdisciplinary, inclusive, and equitable is the goal of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Additionally, it aims to increase educational standards by encouraging innovation and research.

NEP, 2020 offers insightful insights and recommendations on a number of topics related to higher education, such as the transition to multidisciplinary and holistic education, institutional autonomy, the establishment of the National Research Foundation to support high-quality research, and ongoing professional development. Teaching well-rounded pupils with skills for the 21st century is the goal of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 curriculum. It places a strong emphasis on critical thinking, experiential learning, and holistic growth. Arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports, fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values are all included in the curriculum.

Preparatory, Middle, Secondary, and Foundational are the four phases of the curriculum. Early childhood care and education are included in the Foundational stage, which includes the ages of 3 to 8. The age range for the Preparatory Stage is 8–11. The National Education Policy 2020 transforms the secondary stage, which is for students aged 11 to 14. Advancement of interdisciplinary study is emphasized in this policy, which provides novel disciplines with flexible course alternatives and new prospects. By providing a range of entry and exit points and allowing students to choose the classes that best fit their interests and skills, it seeks to increase the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in the higher education sector.

Insights of NEP-2020 for Higher Education

- **Internationalisation:** Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating international perspectives into the delivery of postsecondary education. It's a response to globalization and is becoming a global trend. Internationalization of higher education in practice is "the process of commercializing research and postsecondary education.
- **Enhance GER to 50% by the year 2035:** The aim to increase the GER to 50% by 2035 is a part of broader goals of the NEP 2020, which include Universalisation of education from pre-school to secondary level, extension of Right to Education Act 2009 to cover children of ages 3 to 18, and major reforms in higher education among others.
- **Holistic & Multidisciplinary Education:** Holistic and Multidisciplinary education is a learning approach that combines different subjects and disciplines to develop a well - rounded individuals. It helps students develop critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. Holistic education focuses on developing the whole person, including their physical, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing. It recognizes that education is not just about acquiring knowledge but also about developing character and values.
- **Autonomy and Accountability:** Autonomy and accountability are both important aspects of higher education, and they are closely related. Autonomy refers to the freedom and openness of an institution or individual to think, learn, and act in ways that are different from other. Accountability ensures that an institution or individual meets their obligations and responsibilities. In higher education, accountability ensures that institutions provide quality teaching and learning, and they meet their administrative objectives.
- **Inclusivity and Equity:** Equity and inclusiveness are concepts that aim to ensure fairness and respect for all people. Equity provides fair access to opportunities and resources. It ensures equal treatment for all people. It aims to remove barriers that prevent some groups from participating. It based on the idea that success is based on personal effort. Inclusion involves making people feel valued and included. It allows people to express themselves authentically. It ensures that everyone has access to learning opportunities.
- **Research and Innovation:** Research and innovation in higher education is the process of applying new ideas and technologies to improve teaching, research, and administration. It plays a key role in driving progress and economic growth. Research and innovation can help to educate citizens and advance societies. Research and innovation can help students develop skills and knowledge that will prepare them for success in the job market.
- **Curriculum Flexibility and credit Transfer:** Curriculum flexibility and credit transfer in higher education allow students to customize their learning experience. This can include choosing courses that align with their interests, transferring credits between institutions, and avoiding repeating coursework.
- **Digitalization of Teaching-Learning process:** Digitalization of teaching- learning process" refers to the integration of digital technologies into the traditional classroom setting, allowing setting teachers to deliver lessons and students to access learning materials through online platforms, interactive tools, and digital devices, thereby enhancing the learning experience and making education more flexible and accessible.

- **Dismantling of the ‘UGC’ And ‘AICTE’:** A regulatory council indicated that the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), which aims to replace several regulators including the UGC and AICTE, may cause universities in rural areas that struggle with infrastructure or faculty shortages to close and may also indirectly encourage privatization. In India, the two bodies that oversee higher education are the University Grants Commissions (UGC) and the all-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Technical education is under the purview of AICTE, whilst general education is under the purview of UGC.
- **Skill Development and Vocational Education:** People can acquire the abilities necessary to succeed in the workforce through both vocational education and skill development. People can improve their critical thinking, creativity, and interpersonal abilities by developing their skills. It makes people more flexible and capable of lifelong learning. It facilitates people's complete involvement in their livelihoods. Vocational education facilitates the transition from adolescence to adulthood and helps close the skill gap in the job market.
- **Technology in Education:** In order to promote learning, educational technology combines computer hardware, software, and educational theory and practice. Other instruments such as cameras, LCD and overhead projectors, computers, cellphones, the internet, presentation software, sound recorders, and acoustic systems are also used in education to enhance classroom instruction.
- **Rationalized Education Architecture:** Rationalism in architecture is a style that uses geometric forms and symmetry to create structures with little ornamentation. The ideas of rationalism originated in ancient Greece and Rome, but became more formal during enlightenment. Rationalist architects believed that science was the basis of architecture, rather than imitating traditional beliefs. Rationalism has been a common approach in design studios since the beginning of architecture education in some schools.
- **Distance Learning/Open Learning:** Distance learning and open learning are both educational approaches that can help students learning remotely, but they have different focuses. Distance learning is a mode of instruction where teachers and students are separated by time or place. It involves the use of technology to deliver instruction. Open learning is a learning process that removes barriers to access, such as finances, age, and disability.
- **Imparting Professional Education:** Professional education is specialized training that helps people develop the skills and knowledge they need to perform their jobs. It can take place in formal setting like a school or online. Professional education includes learning about the core concepts, principles, and technologies of a profession. It builds confidence to perform tasks.

Key Issues and Challenges for the Effective Implementation of Higher Education under NEP-2020

- **Limited Institutional Autonomy and Regulatory Overlap:** While NEP-2020 calls for granting universities greater autonomy, rigid oversight by multiple regulatory bodies such as UGC and AICTE restricts curriculum flexibility and innovative governance (Times of India, 2025a).

- **Leadership Gaps and Policy Continuity:** The absence of permanent vice-chancellors in many universities leads to weak institutional leadership and delays in implementing long-term reforms (Times of India, 2025c).
- **Insufficient Funding and Infrastructure:** Despite the target of 6% GDP expenditure on education, budget allocations remain inadequate. Many institutions, particularly in rural areas, face poor infrastructure and limited access to research facilities (Srivastava, 2024).
- **Faculty Shortages and Skill Gaps:** Persistent vacancies, reliance on ad-hoc staff, and inadequate professional development programs hinder the transition to multidisciplinary teaching, research integration, and technology-enabled pedagogy (Inamdar & Parveen, 2020).
- **Digital Divide and Equity Concerns:** Students from underprivileged families are particularly impacted by unequal access to gadgets, the internet, and digital learning tools, which undermines the inclusion objectives of NEP-2020 (Economic Times, 2024).
- **Weak Research and Innovation Ecosystem:** The absence of well-funded research infrastructure and limited collaborative networks hinder the development of a strong research culture envisioned under NEP-2020 (Inamdar & Parveen, 2020).
- **Inadequate Industry Collaboration and Employability Gaps:** A weak link between academia and industry reduces graduate employability. Limited internships, apprenticeships, and joint research initiatives prevent higher education from aligning with labor market needs (Times of India, 2025d).
- **Slow Implementation of Multidisciplinary and Flexible Curricula:** Despite NEP-2020 provisions for multiple entry-exit points and credit transfers, traditional disciplinary silos persist, and only a minority of institutions have adopted these reforms.
- **Resistance to Change and Administrative Inertia:** Conservative institutional cultures, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of awareness about NEP-2020 slow down reform adoption and hinder timely policy execution (Sentinel Assam, 2024).

Recommendations for different stakeholders for effective implementation of Reforms in Higher Education under NEP-2020

- **Government and Policy Makers:** Simplify regulatory structures and ensure transparent governance to avoid overlap between agencies. Provide adequate funding for research, innovation, and digital infrastructure. Grant institutions autonomy with strict performance accountability and focus on rural outreach, scholarships, and regular policy evaluation.
- **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):** Adopt multidisciplinary and flexible curricula with credit transfer and multiple entry–exit options. Build robust internal quality assurance systems and invest in teacher training programs. Strengthen support services, improve campus infrastructure, and foster an inclusive environment for marginalized groups.
- **Teachers and Faculty:** Upgrade continuously in pedagogy, technology integration, and research methodology. Engage in collaborative, interdisciplinary research and mentor students to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Participate actively in institutional planning, curriculum development, and quality initiatives.
- **Students:** Embrace multidisciplinary learning and develop both academic and vocational competencies. Adopt lifelong learning habits, improve digital literacy, and engage in research,

projects, and internships for practical exposure. Focus on building communication, leadership, and teamwork skills to enhance employability.

- **Industry and Employers:** Collaborate with HEIs to design skill-oriented programs aligned with current and emerging job markets. Offer internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship opportunities while supporting research and incubation centers. Provide regular feedback on workforce needs and graduate performance to keep curricula relevant.

Conclusion

A transformative vision for India's higher education system, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to establish a framework that is equitable, multidisciplinary, and globally competitive while maintaining Indian values. By prioritizing access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability, the policy seeks to modernize curricula, strengthen research and innovation, and prepare students with 21st-century skills. However, successful implementation faces significant challenges, including limited institutional autonomy, leadership gaps, inadequate funding, faculty shortages, and a persistent digital divide. Resistance to change, weak industry linkages, and state-level disparities further hinder timely reform. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from government, higher education institutions, faculty, students, and industry stakeholders.

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