India's National Education Policy 2020 and Higher Education: A Critical Analysis*

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India has approved its new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) to transform India's education system, including higher education, by 2040. The significance of this new education policy can be understood from the fact that this is India's first education policy in the twenty-first century that will replace the previous National Policy on Education, which was introduced in 1986. This paper seeks to identify the key characteristics of the NEP 2020, especially with regards to higher education. In doing so, this paper suggests that at least three critical elements in the NEP 2020 make this new education policy unique and different from the earlier education policies. First, it promotes multidisciplinary higher education. Second, it stresses research at higher education institutions and attempts to implement greater academic-industry collaboration successfully. Third, it fosters the globalization of higher education in India. Let us further elaborate aforementioned key features of NEP regarding higher education.

Source: Indian Express (September 7, 2020)[1]

Three key features of the National Education Policy 2020

1. Towards Multidisciplinary Higher Education

The first main feature of the NEP 2020 is it seeks to promote multidisciplinary higher education in India. Indeed, to facilitate holistic and multidisciplinary higher education, the government has taken a landmark decision under the NEP 2020 to establish new universities that will focus on multidisciplinary education. It is decided under the new policy to set up model public universities for holistic and multidisciplinary education, called MERU (Multidisciplinary Education and Research University). It is decided that at least one large multidisciplinary MERU will be established in every district of India by 2030. Restructuring of exiting HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and stand-alone institutions is another important initiative of the NEP 2020 to promote holistic and multidisciplinary education in India. Take the example of India's premium engineering institution,

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1) https://indianexpress.com/article/education/pm-modi-addresses-governors-conference-for-national-education-policy-2020-6586209/

the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs).

In an unprecedented move under the NEP 2020 to strengthen multidisciplinary education, flexible curricula have been introduced by creating multiple entries and exit options in higher education. For example, India's HEIs are now able to offer different types of undergraduate and graduate educations. Equally significant, as part of holistic and multidisciplinary education, new types of vocational education and internship programs for students at all HEIs have been incorporated under the NEP. HEIs will also now have to provide research internships with faculty and other researchers either at their own institutions or other research institutions in the country, including all HEIs.

After initiating the NEP in 2020, the Indian government has further sought to promote holistic education. Indeed, for the COVID-19 era, India's top higher education regulatory body, the UGC (University Grants Commission), has approved full-fledged online degree programs in 38 HEIs across India. According to the new rules, these HEIs are entitled to start full-fledged online programs without prior approval of the UGC.

2. Stress on Research and Academic-Industry Collaboration

The second vital characteristic of NEP 2020 is its stress on research at higher education institutions and attempts to implement greater academic-industry collaboration successfully. Indeed, to accomplish research-related tasks, creating a new National Research Foundation (NRF) is one of the most important initiatives of the new education policy of India. The overarching goal of the creation of the NRF is to catalyze quality academic research in all fields. In order to promote research in higher education, the NRF will carry out four types of activities. First, it will fund competitive, peer-reviewed grant proposals of all types and across all disciplines. Second, it will seed, grow, and facilitate research at academic institutions, particularly at those HEIs where research is currently at a nascent stage, through mentoring such institutions. Third, it will act as a liaison between researchers and relevant branches of government and industry. Forth, the NRF will recognize outstanding research and progress across all disciplines.
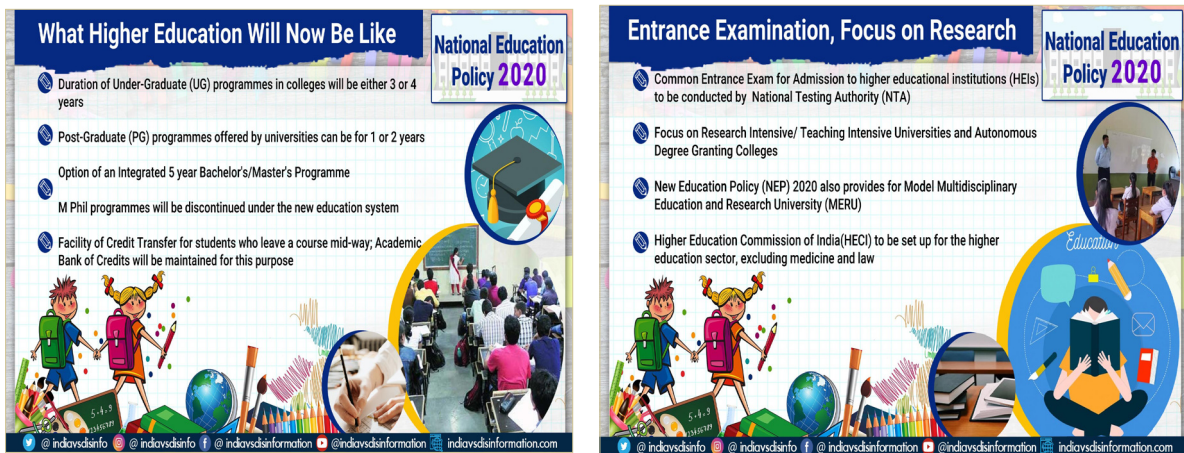
Greater university-industry collaboration and the promotion of research and innovation at all

Indian HEIs is other important initiatives of India's new education policy. Indeed, as there is a growing global trend with respect to academic-industry collaboration, greater university-industry collaboration is also encouraged under the NEP 2020. Indeed, one of the primaries focuses on the new education policy to foster academic-industry collaboration in various ways. In addition to this, in order to promote research and innovation in higher education, it has been decided to set up research centers in frontier areas of research and start-up incubation centers at all HEIs. What is more remarkable is the decision to establish interdisciplinary research in humanities and social sciences. Under the new education policy, it also decided that the newly created NRF will act as a facilitator to help enable and support such a vibrant research and innovation culture across HEIs, research labs, and other research organizations

3. Fostering Globalization of Higher Education

The third and most pivotal feature of the NEP 2020 is to globalize higher education in India in the coming years. In this regard, the government has introduced several key initiatives and programs. One of the essential significant steps taken under the NEP to globalize India's higher education is the adaptation of Internationalization at Home(IaH). Furthermore, academic and research collaboration will be promoted under the NEP to internationalize India's higher education. In this regard, several initiatives will be implemented. To illustrate, India's HEIs will start a new type of student exchange program that stresses short-duration visits to leading universities abroad. In addition to this, a Twinning Arrangement policy is introduced by the NEP for credit recognition and transfer. The establishment of the Office for International Affairs (OIA) at each HEI is another significant move under the NEP to promote the globalization of India's higher education.

Highlights of the New Education Policy 2020

Source: indianewsnetwork (July 30, 2020)[2]

Yet, the most crucial development concerning the globalization of higher education in India came when NEP announced two important initiatives. First, it allowed foreign universities to set up campuses in India. According to NEP, those are among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated by the Ministry of Education of India to set up their facilities in the country. Second, the NEP facilitated India's top-performing HEIs to set up campuses in foreign countries. According to new education policy guidelines, Indian higher education with the Institutions of Eminence (IOEs) tag, which include several IITs, will now be able to set up campuses in foreign countries according to the University Grants Commission (UGC)'s rules. Both moves were taken to foster the globalization of India's higher education under the NEP.

Looking Ahead

Now the question is, what holds the future of India's higher education under the NEP 2020? To achieve key objectives of the NEP 2020 regarding higher education, India must address two critical challenges. First, sustainable and sufficient funding for higher education is key to improving the higher education landscape in India. However, India has limited domestic funds, especially in the era of the COVID-19-induced economic crisis. In this context, allowing foreign universities to set

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2) https://www.indianewsnetwork.com/20200730/highlights-of-the-new-education-policy-2020

up campuses in India is a welcome move. Yet, this is not enough. India should attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in higher education to ease funding issues in this area. Second, the de-politicization of Indian higher education is also a crucial step to improve the quality of higher education in India. The government will need to ensure that there should not be political interference in the functioning of public universities, which are the backbone of higher education in India. In sum, India must address the aforementioned two critical issues to implement the NEP 2020 successfully.

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