



Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee
Research Foundation



**Higher Education Reforms in
National Education Policy 2020:
Roadmap of India to become
Vishwa Guru**

Dr Anirban Das

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Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), unlike its predecessor policies, has been toed as the revamping or restructuring of education in India with the aim of empowering the youth and acclimatise them to follow and adapt more holistic, innovative, adaptive, experimental and ‘less content and more thought driven’ approaches, as governed by Education 4.0, to gain demographic dividend and advantages for our nation. This is the need of the hour as India is the world’s largest democracy and has more than 15 lakh schools, 45,000 colleges and 1043 universities to skill and reskill approximately 33 crore students (Nishank, 2021).

In ancient times, the Gurukul-

based Indian education system was regarded as a sanctuary of learning for scholars from different corners of the country and the globe. Under this system, they gathered knowledge and multi-disciplinary practices in diversified fields of teachings, engaged in debate, acquired lessons in spirituality and many more benefits. Being well-grounded in ancient Indian philosophy and wisdom, it is hoped that NEP 2020 will nurture the value system of the learner from end-to-end with an epitome for excellence (Kant, Prakash, 2021).

The mission of NEP 2020 is to “Reform, Perform and Transform” to meet and overcome various diversified challenges of this century and build a Param Baibhabshali Bharat Rastra as Vishwa Guru (Nishank, 2021).

The Pulse Check

India aspires to be a global superpower by transforming the majority of its youth through the medium of education. This is being done on an unprecedented scale and for it to resonate, the restructuring and reframing of 34-year-old policies is an absolute and much needed requisite. The United Nations Sustainable

Development Goals (UN SDG) canvas of ‘leaving none behind’ states that none is to be left behind, or out of the goals. This pledge is aligned with the historical call of “Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikash” made by Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Naendra Modi ji. The globally accepted UN SDGs are a wakeup call for taking on challenges connected with the three significant pillars of sustainability, namely social, environment and economic (General Assembly of UN, 2015). In the current global landscape, demography is tilted at youth and according to UN population prospects, every fifth young is an Indian. If this huge vibrant and enthusiastic youth population isn’t tapped and guided in meaningful directions, it may cascade towards disaster. Today, a good number of youth are facing numerous challenges as they are in the category of ‘Not in Employment, Education and Training’ (NEET) as per the World Youth Report (2020). The first and foremost step is to engage them in education with aspired careers.

The AISHE 2018-2019 report exemplifies Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) being enriched from 15% (2009-2010) to 26.3% (2018-2019). Indian institutes and universities catering to higher education deal with more than 37 million students, just next to the USA and China. An interesting insight is that the GER of female students (26.4%) is higher than male students (24.3%). Even in 2018-2019, the GER of SC and ST students was 23% and 17.2% respectively. The objective is to raise GER up to 35% by 2035, targetting the remotest

of children/youth for enrollment in mainstream education as their skill sets will be the yardstick for making India a superpower.

NEP 2020: New Directions towards Epitome of Excellence in Higher Education

Bharat was once Vishwa Guru with her rich heritage and eternal philosophy encompassing ‘Gnan’ (knowledge), ‘Pragyaa’ (wisdom) and ‘Satya’ (Truth). Unlike today, acquiring knowledge was not the mission of education. Rather the emphasis was on character building, rationality, ethics and compassion, alongwith self-realisation and liberation. The over arching aim was to develop life skills to deal with and defend against any obstacle surfacing in one’s life. To meet these standards, NEP 2020, as it claims, has been formulated to offer quality and holistic education irrespective of social and economic barriers.

Higher education in India requires comprehensive reforms to get aligned with institutional goals and structures, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment techniques, research as per 21st century needs. A regulatory model of ‘light but tight’ is advocated as per the policy document. There are 24 clauses mentioned as directions for transforming India as envisioned in the policy to make her a global knowledge super power.

Clauses 10 to 19 are dedicated for higher education, while 20 to 24 are

for certain aspects of higher education.

Higher Education Implementation Clauses

Clause 10: Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation

Objective: Transforming Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) into larger (more than equal to 3000 student enrollments) to Multidisciplinary Universities (MUs)

To be achieved:

1. Transforming HEIs to MUs otherwise become a part of a MU (including teaching intensive, research intensive and autonomous) by the year 2030.
2. Capacity building of HEIs target to become a part of a MU to be started by 2021 and ending by 2030. HEIs to join revamped PARAMARSH program if not fulfilling criteria to become a MU.
3. Equitable access to HEIs with one MU in each district. NAC/NAAC will grade HEIs to run ODL programs.
4. Phasing out of affiliating colleges over a period of 15 years. No affiliation to any new college. Self assessment of cost and benefit to be made and report to be submitted to NCHERC and UGC/HEGC.

Clause 11: Towards More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education

Objective: A multidisciplinary and holistic curriculum is to be framed by breaking down existing binaries of Arts, Science, STEM education based on 64 Kalaas (as described in Banbhatta's Kadambari), promoting value education, instilling critical thinking, innovation, problem solving and creativity.

To be achieved:

1. Cross discipline curriculums are to be transformed into multidisciplinary liberal standards by 2025.
2. Institutions to stress on capacity building, faculty to implement multidisciplinary liberal education framework
3. Flexible curriculum formulation to have multiple entry and exits.
4. Employ a Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in designing curriculum and ensure flexibility in choosing subjects of interest even if they are beyond core subjects. The credits should be reflected in an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). HEIs to be part of ABCs.

Clause 12: Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students

Objective: Create a more productive, optimal and supportive environment for students so that the focus is trained on learning outcomes, physical and mental comfort. Enhancing quality in online and distance courses and internationalisation are major goals

to be achieved.

To be achieved:

1. Introducing Pedagogical and Curriculum-based regulatory reforms and in this context UGC/HECI have to come up. Flipped classrooms and continuous evaluation process to be set up.
2. A thorough study required to have a National Higher Education Qualification Framework for measuring learning outcomes.
3. HEIs have to setup hobby clubs and physiological counseling sessions for mental health.
4. UGC/HECI to support HEIs in establishing properly accredited ODL programs.
5. 5. Institutes to incentivize to form central repositories for open access e-resources.
6. Creation of proper environment of learning to attract international students sans geographical barriers.
7. Regulatory reforms to be action oriented for setting up some selective foreign universities' campuses in India and promote joint degrees through credit transfer and synchronisation with international credit systems.
8. 6% of GDP is to be allocated for expenditure on education.

Clause 13: Motivated, Energised and Capable Faculty

Objective: Encouragement

of faculty members by creating a motivating work ambience and culture to foster excellence in teaching, learning and research.

To be achieved:

1. A healthy and motivating working environment to sensitise faculty members to work with ownership.
2. Promote excellence in teaching, research and innovation
3. Enable faculty members to teach as per their expertise and to engage with research groups in their areas of interest.
4. Distinguished faculty members to play pivotal role in an institute's progress. They are to be empowered in various institutional leadership roles.

Clause 14: Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

Objectives: To ensure equitable access to education, especially for Social and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and eventually enhance the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER).

To be achieved:

1. Emphasis on equitable access to education for SEDGs for all students. Reservation for poor students in HEIs through reservation policy by 2023. Introduce fee waiver schemes and scholarship opportunities at HEIs level.
2. Enhance GER and encourage women empowerment.

3. Establish more HEIs in those districts having large number of SEDGs, especially in remote, backward and hill areas.
4. Support of education through local and other Indian languages.
5. HEIs to frame a process for promoting prospects and opportunities of STEM subjects juxtaposed with social sciences and humanities by 2023.
6. Uplift confidence level of students with motivated coaches or teachers so that they can prepare for admission or entrance tests.
5. Introduce a standardised test through a national testing agency to maintain quality in teacher education.
6. Offer four-year bilingual integrated B.Ed courses in MUs by 2030. Ensure Ph.D students take credit-based courses in teaching pedagogy.
7. Develop a National Mission for Mentoring with senior or retired teachers having exceptional and outstanding teaching base, both in India or outside.

Clause 15: Teacher Education

Objective: Multidisciplinary perspective on education of Teachers to be incorporated

To be achieved:

1. Rather than standalone teacher training institutes, create a teacher education department within a multidisciplinary university.
2. Establish a mandate to submit Performance Appraisal Report of Teacher Education Institutes annually.
3. Combine practice teaching, recruitment and research to establish a good network with both public and private schools.
4. Empower regulatory authorities to take strict action against dysfunctional teacher education institutes. Use SWAYAM or DIKSHA for updating offline or online professional training.

Clause 16: Reimagining Vocational Education

Objective: Mainstreaming quality vocational education in schools and universities.

To be achieved:

1. To enhance skills of students in vocational education and training based on some empirical data.
2. Promote collaboration with all stakeholders to create an effective ecosystem for enriching the current pool of teachers, employees and students.
3. Merge AICTE and VET (DGET) (Vocational Education and Training/Directorate General of Employment & Training). Both to be under the purview of HECI (Higher Education Commission of India) with the objective of creating a seamless Technical Skills Framework.
4. Measure sector specific skill gaps

- at regional, state and national level.
5. Encourage at least one vocational course before graduation and adopt DIY (Do It Yourself) opportunities for students.

Clause 17: Catalysing Quality Academic Research in All Fields through new National Research Foundation

Objective: Quality research promotion and encouragement irrespective of domain and encourage framing of National Research Foundation as India has a great tradition of knowledge creation and research in domains ranging from art, literature, agriculture, medicine to science and mathematics.

To be achieved:

1. Transformation of governance and regulatory changes like creation of National Research Foundation and introduction of a integrated national cross-disciplined research policy.
2. Introduce and promote merit-based incentive structures for faculty members engaged in research required for accreditation and status of RU/ TU/ AC.
3. Dedicated budgetary allocations for capacity building like research labs, equipment, etc. and collaboration with premier institutes or organisations for getting field of exposure and funding in research.
4. Include research internships in UG course curriculum and PG for a semester.

5. Equip libraries enough to give access to high quality research journals and conference proceedings or large databases to all HEIs.
6. Increase funds in research and development activities within HEIs, or from other external agencies.

Clause 18: Transforming Regulatory System of Higher Education

Objective: Restructuring present regulatory bodies in higher education for them to have a more transparent framework to promote distinct and independent academic standards.

To be achieved:

1. Establish a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) with specific principles like it being made the highest body to regulate higher education in India. It should represent the nation's vivid versatility and diversity. It should govern 'light but tight' principle and not over-regulate verticals like the NHERC (National Higher Education Regulatory Council), NAC (National Accreditation Council), HEGC (Higher Education Grants Council) and GEC (General Council). The HECI's overall functioning should encompass mechanisms like guideline preparation, offer support to verticals for implementation, tracking and monitoring.
2. Establish NHERC with the objective of setting up a regulatory

framework that supports a federal structure of higher education. It should make certain that multidisciplinary HEIs should keep a glance on the teaching, research and community engagement with the best quality standards.

3. NAC, a meta- accrediting authority, to encourage decentralisation of the accreditation process and also ensure transparency and accountability of HEIs. It should empower HEIs to be responsive towards the needs of all stakeholders with a motive to create societal transformation.
4. HEGC framework to support financial autonomy of all HEIs through systematic disbursement of funds as per norms and performance.
5. GEC to decide and determine ‘Graduate Attributes’ with heads like subject knowledge expert, critical thinker and implementer and thought transparency and communication. It will try to integrate and incorporate vocational education into higher education by setting up a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF).

Clause 19: Effective Governance and Leadership for Higher Education Institutions

Objective: To have accountability and operation transparency through efficient leadership and governance in HEIs.

To be achieved:

1. Creation of an effective leadership to establish HEIs as a culture of excellence and innovation.
2. To enable self-governance, set up a Board of Governors (with Institutional Development Plan) consisting of competent and highly qualified individuals with proven capabilities and deep commitment towards HEIs.
3. Graded autonomy guidelines are to be made to set up an autonomous hierarchy of the board.
4. Faculty members are to be nourished and nurtured to take up institutional leadership positions with proven competence.
5. HEIs to prepare and set up an Eminent Experts Committee (EEC) and BOG, Institutional Development Plan (IDP), disclosure audit.
6. By 2035, all HEI Clusters, MERUs and MUs will be required to undergo one round of disclosures and audit.

Conclusion

Envisaging an unprecedented range of possibilities, the policy, framed in a democratic manner by obtaining suggestions from almost two lakh people, is highly structured to uncover student potential with a focus on holistic growth and emphasis on the unique capability of each student, ensure flexibility of their learning trajectories at their own pace, creativity

and critical thinking, promote a light but tight regulatory framework, ensure outstanding research, inculcate ethics and human values, life skills and so many other qualities. By implementing NEP 2020 in letter and spirit, and with a global outlook that is deeply grounded in the local context, India can transform herself into a global super power and in turn restore the deep rooted pride in being Vishwa Guru.

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(The writer is Professor & Vice President- Innovation Council, University of Engineering & Management, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal)

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**Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee
Research Foundation**

9, Ashoka Road, New Delhi- 110001

Web :- www.spmrf.org, E-Mail: office@spmrf.org,

Phone:011-69047014



@spmrfoundation

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