



Challenges of Indian Higher Education System: A study in the light of National

Education Policy 2020

Dr. Niranjana Das

Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, Duliajan College

Email: niranjandjg@gmail.com

Abstract:

Recognizing the significance of higher education in fostering both individual and societal well-being, as well as contributing to the economic development of India, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has proposed a structural transformation of the current system. India's higher education system ranks as the third largest globally in terms of student enrollment, following China and the United States, and is the largest worldwide in terms of the number of educational institutions. The advantageous demographic characteristics of India can only be effectively harnessed through a modern and sophisticated higher education system. In light of this, the NEP 2020 has identified the primary challenges currently confronting India's higher education system. The Policy has proposed various reform measures to address these challenges. Against this backdrop, this study aims to examine the major difficulties within India's higher educational ecosystem in the context of NEP 2020 and to identify measures to resolve the issues faced by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The study relies on secondary data collected from various reliable sources. The NEP 2020 recognizes the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the existing higher education framework to align with global standards and meet the evolving demands of the 21st century. By addressing key challenges such as fragmentation, lack of multidisciplinary approaches, and limited research focus, the policy aims to create a more robust and inclusive educational ecosystem. Implementation of these reforms is expected to enhance the quality of education, improve employability, and position India as a global knowledge superpower in the coming decades.

Key Words:

NEP-2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary

1.0: Introduction

India's Higher education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and United States and largest in the world in terms of number of educational institutions. Higher education institutions in the country are mainly categorized into universities, colleges and stand-alone institutions. University and University Level Institutions are empowered to award degree under some Act of Parliament or State Legislature. In terms of how they are established the universities in India can be classified in three types: conventional universities, institutions of national importance and deemed-to-be universities. Conventional universities are tertiary level institutions that are established through Acts of Parliament or State Legislature. Those established by Acts of Parliament are funded by the Central Government and are commonly referred to as Central Universities. Those established by Acts of State Legislatures are funded by the respective State Governments and are referred to as state universities. The institutions of national importance are the institutions established or so designated by Acts of Parliament and fall under the administrative control of the Department of Higher Education. These institutions undertake teaching and research in areas that are critical to national development. They include the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management etc. Deemed-to-be universities are the institutions with the status of autonomy granted by the Department of Higher Education on the advice of the UGC, under Section of the UGC Act, 1956 for work of high quality in specialized academic fields. Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai is an example of such institution.

Colleges are institutions which are not empowered to provide degree in their own name and therefore are affiliated or recognised with universities. Main categories of colleges in India are –affiliated colleges, constituent colleges and autonomous colleges.

Stand-alone institutions are not affiliated to any university but are recognised by various councils or ministries. They are not empowered to provide degree and therefore run diploma level programmes. There are two types of stand-alone institutions –the first type includes diploma level technical institutions such as polytechnics, which are generally recognised by AICTE and administered by State Directorate of Technical Education. The second type of stand-alone institutions includes diploma level teacher training institutions including DIETs recognized by NCTE and generally administered by SCERT.

The higher educational institutions of India have been facing many problems and challenges since their establishment. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by Central Cabinet, unveiled on 29th July, 2020 has brought new challenges as well as opportunities to

Indian higher education system. The main thrust of the NEP 2020 is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges and knowledge hubs each of which will aim to have 3000 or more students.

2.0: Objectives of the Study

Our study aims to undertake the following objectives:

1. To find out the major challenges which the higher educational institutions of India have been facing.
2. The new challenges faced by the HEIs in India, brought by the National Education Policy -2020
3. The find out measure to solve the problems faced by the HEIs in India.

3.0: Methodology of the study

This study is entirely based on secondary data collected from various reliable sources like UNESCO, All India Survey of Higher Education, Times World University Ranking etc. The data is both quantitative and qualitative. The collected data has been analysed by mostly descriptive method and by using simple statistical tools like table, graph etc.

4.0: Data Analysis and findings

4.0.1: Higher Education in the light of NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 identifies that “Higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution - a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all.” India is moving towards becoming a knowledge economy and hence more and more young Indians are likely to aspire for higher education.

To meet the intellectual requirements of the 21st century the NEP 2020 proposes to bring the following changes to the structure of Indian higher education system-

1. moving towards a higher educational system consisting of large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one in or near every district, and with more HEIs across India that offer medium of instruction or programmes in local/Indian languages;
2. moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education;
3. moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy;

4. revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and student support for enhanced student experiences;
5. reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service;
6. establishment of a National Research Foundation to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research and to actively seed research in universities and colleges;
7. governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;
8. “light but tight” regulation by a single regulator for higher education;
9. increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students; online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL); and all infrastructure and learning materials accessible and available to learners with disabilities.

The main thrust of NEP 2020 regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges, and HEI clusters/Knowledge Hubs, each of which will aim to have 3,000 or more students.

The new policy aims to establish and develop more HEIs in backward or underserved regions to ensure full access, equity, and inclusion. There shall, by 2030, be at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district. Steps shall be taken towards developing high-quality higher education institutions both public and private that have medium of instruction in local/Indian languages or bilingually. The aim will be to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035. The policy also raises questions on the existence of multiple regulatory systems and aims to bring all the HEIs inside the purview of one common regulatory authority.

4.0.2: Indian Higher Education System: Major Challenges

India’s Higher education system is the world’s third largest in terms of students, next to China and United States and largest in the world in terms of number of educational institutions. ‘Table 1’ shows the number of higher education institutes in the country.

Table 1: Number of Higher Education Institutions in India

HEIs	Number
Universities	1019
Colleges	39955
Stand Alone Institutions	9599
Total	50573

Source: All India Survey of Higher Education 2019-20

Table 1 shows that number of colleges in India is much higher as compared to the number of universities. The number of stand alone HEIs in India is also very high.

4.0.3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

Gross enrolment ratio is *the ratio of student's enrolment in school or any educational institution at stage of education level* such as primary, secondary, higher education etc. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) or Gross Enrolment Index (GEI) is a statistical measure used in the education sector, and formerly by the UN in its Education Index, to determine the number of students enrolled in school at several different grade levels (like elementary, middle school and high school), and use it to show the ratio of the number of students who live in that country to those who qualify for the particular grade level. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), describes "Gross Enrolment Ratio" as the total enrolment within a country "in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education"

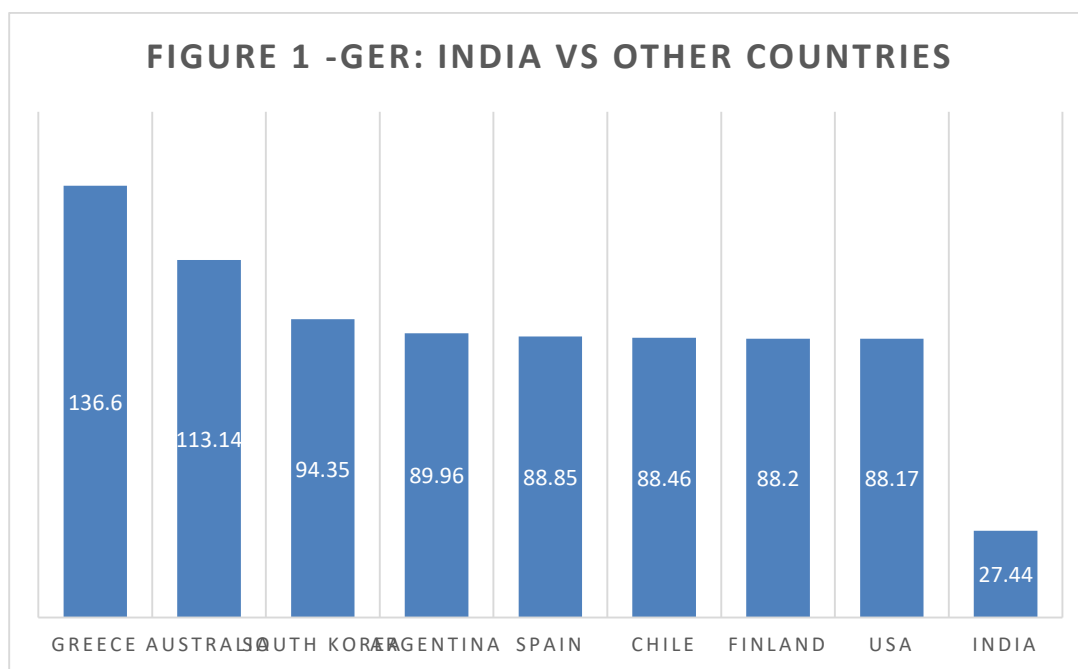
Table 2: GER at Higher Educational Institutes -2017

Rank	Country	GER (%)
1	Greece	136.60
2	Australia	113.14
4	Republic of Korea	94.35
5	Argentina	89.96
6	Spain	88.85
7	Chile	88.46
9	Finland	88.20

10	USA	88.17
	India	27.44

Source: UNESCO

The status of Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education system in India as compared to some other countries can be clearly understood from figure 1.



‘Figure 1’ clearly shows the deviation of the achievement of India in higher education as compared to some developed countries in terms of gross enrolment ratio.

4.0.4: The New Education Policy 2020 identifies the following challenges in the higher education system of India.

- (a) A severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem;
- (b) Less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;
- (c) A rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study;
- (d) Limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages
- (e) Limited teacher and institutional autonomy;
- (f) Inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders;
- (g) Lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer reviewed research funding across disciplines;
- (h) Suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs;

- (i) An ineffective regulatory system; and
- (j) Large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education.

4.0.5: New Challenges to HEIs brought by NEP-2020

The NEP 2020 has aimed to bring a structural change to the higher educational ecosystem of the country. In this regard we observe some challenges which the present higher education system of India is facing to initiate the process of implementation of new reforms suggested by the Policy.

1. Only 2.7 percent colleges run PhD Programme and 35.04 percent colleges run Post Graduate level programmes.
2. There are 32.6 percent colleges which run only single programme out of which 84.1 percent are privately managed. Among these privately managed colleges, 37.4 colleges run B.Ed. courses only.
3. 16.6 percent of the colleges are having enrolment less than 100 and only 4 percent colleges have enrolment more than 3000.
4. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India is only 27.4 which is 26.9 for male population and 27.3 for female. For scheduled castes, it is 23.4 and for scheduled tribes, it is only 18 as compared to the national GER of 27.4.
5. Another challenge is the limited access particularly in socio economically disadvantaged areas, with few higher education institutions that teach in local languages. There is no equity in college density; for example, the number of colleges per lakh eligible population (population in the age group 18 to 23 years) varies from 7 in Bihar to 59 in Karnataka as compared to all India average of 30 (AISHE, 2019-20).
6. Another challenge is the existence of a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study. The harmful expressions are the enormous number of mono-field institutions most notably in the professional and vocational fields; for example: 3,849 stand alone teacher education institutions (AISHE, 2019-20) and most engineering and medical colleges being stand alone or single discipline institutions. This violates the basic requirement of a good higher education system.
7. Another major challenge is the existence of a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem. India has over 1,043 universities and 42,343 colleges

(listed in AISHE web portal), reflecting the overall severe fragmentation and small size of HEIs currently in the country. Remarkably, over 32.6 percent of all colleges in the country run only a single programme, far from the multidisciplinary style of higher education which is a requirement in the 21st century. In fact, over 16.6 percent of colleges have enrolment below 100, while only 4 percent of colleges have enrolment over 3000 (AISHE 2019-20).

8. Another problem is the existence of limited teacher and institutional autonomy. ‘Autonomy’ must mean the freedom to innovate, to compete, to cooperate, to govern more locally, to optimise resources given one’s direct local knowledge of circumstances and opportunities, to break silos, and to excel. The system of affiliated colleges makes it very difficult to provide teachers with autonomy.
9. Another challenge is the existence of very little funding for novel research ideas and proposals at most HEIs, especially for research in important multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary areas (e.g., relating to clean water, renewable energy, education and pedagogy, health etc.)
10. Existence of a number of regulatory councils with lack of coordination among them is another problem. There is unnecessary and illusory separation between the standards governing technical and non-technical education. The multiple sets of rules and sub-regulations prescribed by regulatory councils particularly UGC and AICTE -a deterrent to the development of premier educational institutions.
11. Another problem is the suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs. Governance and leadership of HEIs in India is deeply influenced and controlled by external bodies and individuals who often have vested political and/or commercial interests in the HEIs. Public institutions are often operated as extensions of government departments with external interference in the selection and functioning of leaders of public institutions.
12. Large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education is another challenge. A major structural weakness in our higher education system with the growth of universities in the form of affiliating institutions. Some universities in India are with large number of affiliated colleges to the extend of 800 to 900.

13. Indian HEIs have low global status. HEIs in India are not particularly strong in the areas emphasised in world university rankings which is certainly a cause for concern. No Indian university is figured in the first 200 ranks un prestigious Times Higher Education World University Rankings for the last many years. The picture is clear from the table 3:

Table 3:
Top 5 HEIs of India in NIRF 2020 and their position in the Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings (WUR) 2020

Rank in NIRF	HEIs	Rank in THE 2020	Rank in QS WUR 2020
1.	IIT Madras, Chennai	601-800	271
2.	IISc., Bengaluru	301-350	184
3.	IIT Delhi, N. Delhi	401-500	182
4.	IIT Bombay, Mumbai	401-500	152
5.	IIT Kharagpur	401-500	281

Source: Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings 2020

5.0: Conclusion

The new education policy 2020 has aimed to bring a great structural change in the higher educational ecosystem of the country. The main objective of the Policy is to make the nation equipped with modern skill and knowledge as required in this twenty first century. But, the present higher education system of India has many problems which are challenging the implementation of the policies set by the NEP 2020. The higher education system of India must overcome these challenges and only then our economy will be capable of reaping the benefit of its favourable demographic characteristics.

References

1. Aithal, P. S., & Aithal, S. (2020), Implementation Strategies of Higher Education Part of National Education Policy 2020 of India towards Achieving its Objectives. International Journal of Management Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS), 5(2)
2. All India Survey of Higher Education; <https://aishe.gov.in/aishe/home>, Accessed on 25th September 2022.
3. Burman, A. (2021) 'NEP 2020: Central govt notifies 4 –years integrated teacher education programme', *India Times*, 28 October, 2021
4. Chari, R. (2020) 'NEP 2020: Empowering the teacher', *Times of India*, 30 August.
5. Chopra, Ritika (2 August 2020). "Explained: Reading the new National Education Policy 2020". The Indian Express.
6. Higher Education; <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education>, Accessed on 9th September 2022.
7. Krishna, Atul (29 July 2020). "NEP 2020 Highlights: School And Higher Education". NDTV
8. Kumar, K. (2005). Quality of Education at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Lessons from India. Indian Educational Review
9. Mathew, S. (2022) 'Curriculum Changes in Higher Education as Proposed by the National Education Policy-2020: Scope for International Studies and Area Studies', *University News*, 60(22), p24-25.
10. National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf accessed on 4th September 2022.
11. NDTV educational news, <https://www.ndtv.com/education/nep-2020-board-exams-be-made-easier-says-education-ministry> accessed on 20th September 2022.
12. Nandini, ed. (29 July 2020). "New Education Policy 2020 Highlights: School and higher education to see major changes". Hindustan Times
13. New Education Policy 2020 Highlights: School and higher education to see major changes, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/new-education-policy-2020-live->

updates-important-takeaways/story-yYm1QaeNyFW4uTTU3g9bJO.html accessed on 6th September 2022.

14. Rohatgi, Anubha, ed. (7 August 2020). "Highlights | NEP will play role in reducing gap between research and education in India: PM Modi". Hindustan Times.
15. World University Ranking: Times Higher Education; <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings> , Accessed on 27th September 2022.