

Chapter-1

New Education Policy 2020: Academic Research

In Higher Education

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The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century and replaces the thirty-four year old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, this policy is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and higher education more holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, suitable to 21st century needs and aimed at bringing out the unique capabilities of each student. After the independence it gives priority to research in higher educational institutions. While doing so, it considered the fact that academic research is an integral part of the higher education system.

The new NEP introduced changes in the education system from school level to college or university level. Keeping in mind the developing scenario, education content and at the same time, will focus on key-concepts, ideas, applications and problem-solving angles. The National Education Policy is expected to bring positive and long-lasting impact on the higher education system of the country. The foreign universities are invited and allowed to open campuses in India. This will help the students experience a global quality of education in their own country. The policy of introducing multi-disciplinary institutes will lead to a renewed focus on every field such as arts, humanities and this form of education will help students to learn and grow holistically.

The single common entrance test concept is another positive step which will reduce the stress of multiple competitive exams and reduce the pressure of preparing for number of them. To set an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) is definitely a robust idea to store the academic credits that students earn by taking courses from various recognized higher education institutions. A student can gain scores by completing a course and these will be credited to the ABC account. One can then transfer these credits if he/she decides to change colleges. If a student drops out by a reason, these credits will remain intact which means he / she can come back years later and pick up from where the student had left.

The new education policy structure will ensure that distinct administrative, accreditation, financing, and academic standard-setting roles are performed by separate, autonomous, and empowered bodies. These four structures will be established as four independent verticals within a single umbrella institution, India's Higher Education Commission (HECI). There are a lot of reforms and new developments which have been introduced by NEP in the higher education sector. Some of the salient features are:

- **Single regulatory body for higher education:**

The NEP aims to establish Higher Education Commission of India which will be the single regulatory body except for legal and medical education.

- **Multiple entry and exit programme:**

There will be multiple entry and exit options for those who wish to leave the course in the middle. Their credits will be transferred through Academic Bank of Credits.

- **Tech- based option for adult learning through apps, TV channels:**

Quality technology-based options for adult learning such as apps, online courses/modules, satellite-based TV channels, online books, and ICT-equipped libraries and Adult Education Centres, etc. will be developed.

- **E-courses to be available in regional languages:**

Technology will be part of education planning, teaching, learning, assessment, teacher, school, and student training. The e-content to be available in regional languages, starting with 8 major languages – Kannada, Odia, Bengali among others to join the e-courses available in Hindi and English.

- **Foreign universities to set-up campuses in India:**

World's top 100 foreign universities will be facilitated to operate in India through a new law. According to the HRD Ministry document, "such (foreign) universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India."

- **Common entrance exam for all colleges:**

The common Entrance exam for all higher education institutes to be held by National Testing Agency (NTA). The exam will be optional.

A Higher Education Council of India (HECI) will be set up to regulate higher education. The council's goal will be to increase gross enrolment ratio. The HECI will have 4 verticals:

- 1) National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), to regulate higher education, including teacher education, while excluding medical and legal education.
- 2) National Accreditation Council (NAC), a "meta-accrediting body".

3) Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), for funding and financing of universities and colleges. This will replace the existing National Council for Teacher Education, All India Council for Technical Education and the University Grants Commission.

4) General Education Council (GEC), to frame "graduate attributes", namely the learning outcomes expected. It will also be responsible in framing a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF). The National Council for Teacher Education will come under the GEC, as a professional standard setting body (PSSB).

One of the un-avowed objectives of higher education is to create fresh knowledge, perennially for the purpose of teaching as well as building an informed society. This unstated mandate expects to undertake research from the teachers of the higher educational institutions, especially in the universities and higher learning centres. This expectation of undertaking continuous research has bestowed distinction to many higher educational institutions abroad.

India is an example to have inbuilt research in the academic curriculum of the higher education system for a long time. The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 the first time has placed priority on research in higher educational institutions. While doing so, it has rightly accepted fact that academic research is an integral part of the higher education system in most knowledge societies. Research from time to time facilitates understanding the new realm of fresh knowledge, which in turn benefits teaching. Research also exposes societies and economies to innovative thinking besides finding solutions to various socio-economic problems through public intercession. That apart, research brings about innovation in science, technology and in every other field. In fact, the promotion of research in the higher education system is one of the ten envisions of the NEP, by institutionalising research funding, which is a critical requirement. In fact, the NEP has laid a landmark commitment, especially in financing academic research. This has come against the backdrop of a lack of adequate public and institutional funding for undertaking research in the field of art, language, culture, society, economy, environment etc. At the same time, there could be some exceptions in the field of space, science and technology, which have attracted a great deal of financial support from the special purpose institutions and private industries.

There has been a major shift in focus from research to only studies at the post-graduation and doctoral levels, especially in the universities that are the highest places of knowledge creation. This shift over the years has prompted most university departments to limit their scope to only the studies and leave the research almost completely. In other words,

the academic departments have lost sight of the research in their specific areas and teaching faculty has been given complete freedom from undertaking research. This new trend besides affecting the very trait and character of higher education made it dependent upon the obsolete curriculum of teaching for a longer period. Secondly, a dearth of public funding has hampered the research culture and caused colossal damage to higher education. It has been rightly pointed out by the NEP that India's investment in research is less than 1 % of the Gross Domestic Product, which is far less than the investment of even small countries. Almost with bleak or no public funding for research in the country, what disturb further is the corruption practices by the funding authorities to sanction research grants. This unethical situation is due to the increasing number of research studies seeking funds, which is, in turn, owing to very negligible public allocations. Thirdly, in the absence of adequate funding, most universities have relegated the research agenda and fine-tuned their budget only to meet the establishment expenditures like salaries, maintenance, etc., owing to a resource crunch. If at all universities funding for research, not only is very negligible but is selectively provided depending on the vicinity of the scholars to the authorities. Thus, self-financing by the higher educational institutions for research is largely absent, owing to highly subsidised fee structures. Lastly, corporate funding and industry support for research are not available across all the disciplines. Instead, funding from such sources is project-specific confining to science and technology largely and as a result, socially relevant research themes have been thrown out of the ambit, however important they are.

To change the current trend and to bring back the lost glory of higher education in research, the NEP envisaged two very significant roadmaps: (1) to develop research capabilities among the faculty members and to facilitate the development of research culture in the state universities and other public institutions; and (2) to seed and fund the peer-reviewed research studies with the establishment of National Research Foundation (NRF). The NEP has mandated making research a part of the programme curriculum at the bachelor's and master's levels. It has directed the introduction of four years integrated programme with three years bachelor's and one year of master's programme with research. Further, in the two years of Masters' courses for those who completed 3 years of bachelor's programme, the second year shall be devoted entirely to research. Lastly, Doctoral research leading to a Ph.D. degree is allowed only with a master's degree or a 4-year bachelor's degree with research. The NRF will provide merit-based but equitable peer-reviewed research funding in all the disciplines of the state universities and other public institutions. The first initiative would give birth to new researchers with the needed skill set and is prompting the

student-scholars to undertake relevant research of their interest. Similarly, the second initiative is a first and kindles the research interest across all the disciplines by supplying research funds. Importantly, the establishment of the NRF can also solve most of the problems associated with the process of research funding by putting transparent selection procedures in place. Interestingly, the present departments of Science and Technology, Atomic Energy, Biotechnology and Councils for Agriculture Research, Medical Research, Historical Research and University Grants Commission will continue to fund research, according to their needs and properties.

To conclude, the NEP is a path-breaking start, which has given a new dimension to research with a pattern in the higher education sector of the country. With this, the intentions of the policy are very clear that the higher educational institutions, particularly the universities would bring back the research culture and becomes knowledge creation centres. But it must be remembered that the success entirely lies in the strict implementation of the policy provisions. The NEP must create an environment to promote hassle-free research in the universities and in higher education centres. The other new initiative of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) shall ensure new curriculum design is enunciated in the NEP at the earliest without losing any more time, in order to suffice the un-avowed goal for the creation of fresh knowledge. Secondly, the creation of the NRF shall not be an analogous institution with in the country. Instead, it must truly live up to its purposes to enhance the flow of research funding in all the disciplines of the higher educational institutions. Thirdly, most of the objectives contemplated in the NEP become reality only when there is substantial public funding decided by the government. It must step up the budgetary allocation for research in the hitherto neglected disciplines like Social Sciences & Humanities, Environment, History, Cross-Cultural, etc., across the country. The government shall enhance public spending substantially for research if at all it intends to build a knowledge society like any other advanced society.

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