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NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 AND HIGHER EDUCATION: A BRIEF REVIEW

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Abstract

It is well known fact that a well-defined, visionary and futuristic education policy is a must for every country because education is the key driver of economic and social progress. Taking into account their respective traditions and culture, different countries have adopted varied education systems. Recently Government of India announced its New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which intended to transform our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all. It is a welcome step, which will bring about a paradigm shift India's education system and will transform it into a modern, progressive, and equitable one.

This conceptual research article is based on NEP 2020 focuses on Higher Education (HE). Authors of the article intends to discuss background and emergence; to highlight vision, focus thrust areas and principle guidelines; and necessarily to bring out features, impact areas and opportunities to stakeholders as well. Finally, they are emphasizing the need for planned, systematic and careful implementation of the policy.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), Higher Education, Quality Education, Education System, Paradigm Shift, Sustainable Development.

1. Brief Introduction: Quality education is of fundamental importance for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development. And universal high quality education is the key to India's continued ascent and leadership on the global platform in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality; scientific and technological advancement; national integration and preservation of culture as well. At present, the world is undergoing rapid changes in knowledge and employment landscapes. In this scenario, an education system must build and shape character; enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate and caring; while at the same time prepare them for gainful employment. It is to be noted that the gap between current state of learning outcomes and what is required, can be bridged through reforms in education system. The reforms necessarily bring about quality, equity and integrity into the system, from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to Higher Education (HE). Therefore, it was necessary that India should have an education system with equitable access to the high quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background.

In this context, India has adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SD), which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education; and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. And such a dreamy goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster process of education, so that all of the critical targets and goals i.e. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4.4) of the 2030 Agenda can be achieved. So as to bring about reformation in the existing education system the Government of India decided to revamp it by introducing a comprehensive National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The new policy envisions an India centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all. It is the first education policy of the 21st century, which aims to address many growing developmental imperatives of our country. This Policy proposes revising and revamping of all aspects of the education system, including its regulation and governance in order to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, while building upon India's traditions and value systems. NEP 2020 lays particular emphasis on development of the creative potential of each individual and higher order cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving; and also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. Most importantly, the rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thoughts has guided to frame this Policy.

2. Emergence of NEP 2020: Long back India's first Education Policy was introduced in the year 1986. About thirty-four years thereafter, a new policy called National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is introduced by the Government of India. NEP 2020 thus replaces National Policy on Education of 1986. The policy signifies a huge milestone for India's education system, which will certainly make India an attractive destination for higher education world-wide.

The Government of India had taken initiative in January 2015, and the actual consultation process for the New Education Policy was started under the chairmanship of former Cabinet Secretary Shri. T. S. R. Subramanian. Based on the committee report, in June 2017, the draft NEP was submitted in 2019 by a panel led by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman Dr. K. Kasturirangan. The Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) 2019 was then released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), followed by a number of public consultations. Thereafter, the Ministry undertook a rigorous consultation process in formulating the draft policy. In the process of emergence the new policy document has been updated, revised and finally approved on 29th July, 2020.

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which was approved by the Union Cabinet of India on 29th July, 2020, outlines the vision of India's new education system. The policy envisions an India-centred education system that contributes directly to transforming the nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all. The policy provides a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher education as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India. The policy aims to transform India's education system by 2021. The policy unequivocally endorses and envisions a substantial increase in public investment in education by both the Central government and all State Governments.

3. NEP 2020: What's it about? National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) will bring in ambitious and dramatic change that could transform education system in the country. It will bring about revolutionary changes in the education system of India.

3.1 Vision: NEP 2020 aims at building a global best education system rooted in Indian ethos, and aligned with the principles enunciated in the discussion below, thereby transforming India into a global knowledge superpower.

3.2 Thrust Areas: NEP 2020 is necessarily addressing the crippling challenges that have affected the Indian Education System for over last few decades. Certain thrust areas of the policy are:

- **In Primary Education, poor literacy and numeracy outcomes:** Several reports show that 50% children lack basic numeracy i.e. the ability to understand and work with numbers and literacy despite spending five years in school. NEP 2020 basically looks at this foundational learning as a core area and aims at developing multiple skills and abilities among the students.
- **In Middle and Secondary Education, high dropout levels, curriculum inconsistency:** Dropout rates at the secondary level in several states have increased over the past three years according to the ministry's data. There are multiple reasons behind drop out such as poverty, poor health and distance from school. Moreover, large variations in dropout rates exist across states, gender, ethnicity and class. Even the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is also decreasing considerably as the data indicates that a significant proportion of enrolled students are dropping out after Grade 5 and especially after Grade 8. Therefore, minimising dropout rate and increasing GER, particularly at middle and secondary education level is also a thrust area of the policy.
- **In Higher Education, a lack of multi-disciplinary approach and flexibility with regards to subject choice, assessment as well as a skill-gap:** Dropout rate is also increasing in higher education institutions. At the same time Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is decreasing and remained about less than half of that is in middle and secondary education. It means many students are not enrolling in higher education. Hence, the policy mainly focuses on to minimising dropout rate and increasing GER in higher education institutions.
- Moreover, overall thrust areas for NEP 2020 include childhood care, curriculum design, language/medium of instruction, teacher training, teacher appraisal, assessment pattern and evaluation and exam format. A new assessment centre called, PARAKH i.e. Performance, Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge of Holistic Development is proposed to determine the standards for education.
- Lastly, issues with regulation, recruitment of teachers and the absence of common standards and norms for universities are the additional areas in this new policy.

3.3 Principle Guidelines: The foundational pillars of this policy are *access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability*. The policy strongly believes in the thought that the purpose of education is to develop good human beings capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. Thus, it aims at producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution. The principle guidelines on which this policy is based are:

- **Flexibility**, for learners to choose their subjects and programmes, and thereby choose their paths in life according to their own talents interests.
- **No hard separations** between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic etc. to ensure the integrity and unity of knowledge and eliminate harmful hierarchies among and silos between different areas of learning.
- **Multi-disciplinary** and holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities and sports for a multi-disciplinary world.
- **Emphasis on conceptual understanding** rather than rote learning and learning for exams only, **on creativity and critical thinking** to encourage logical decision-making and innovation, **on ethics as well as human and Constitutional values** e.g. empathy, respect for others, cleanliness, etiquette, courtesy, democratic spirit, spirit of service, scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, equality and justice and **on life skills** e.g. cooperation, teamwork, communication and resilience.
- **Regular formative assessment for learning** rather than the summative assessment that encourages today's coaching culture.
- **A respect for diversity and respect for the local context** in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy by always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject.
- **Total equity and inclusion** is the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.
- **Resource efficiency** without any compromise on equity and quality along with **optimum utilisation of resources**.

- **Being teachers and faculty as the heart of a learning process**, their rigorous recruitment and preparation, continuous professional development, positive working environments and service conditions are require to be assured.
- **A light but tight oversight and regulatory system** to ensure **integrity and transparency** of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while simultaneously encouraging innovation and creative ideas through **autonomy, good governance and empowerment**.
- **Outstanding research** as a prerequisite for outstanding education and continuous development.
- **Continuous policy-making** based on regular assessment of realities on the ground by educational experts.
- A rootedness and pride in India and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture, knowledge systems and traditions, and its forward looking aspirations to be incorporated in an accurate manner, and **form an anchor and source of inspiration for all education**.
- **Education is a public service** and not a commercial activity or source of profit, and access to quality education must need to be considered a fundamental right of every citizen.
- **Lastly, substantial investment in a strong, vibrant public education system** as well as the encouragement and facilitation of true philanthropic private participation.

However, these guiding principles need to be followed in the process of implementation of the National Education Policy i.e. NEP 2020. They will certainly help to keep aside the hurdles in its smooth implementation and to overcome the challenges as well.

4. NEP 2020 and Higher Education: National Education Policy (NEP 2020) aims to transform education, keeping the learner at the centre. It builds on the recommendations of Education Commission (1964-66) and Justice J. S. Verma Commission (2012) as well as the previous versions of the policy i.e. National Policy on Education 1986, modified in 1992, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 and Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. In fact, it is a huge stride in the right education. It mainly focuses on the holistic development of students by ensuring access, relevance, equity, quality and strong foundational learning. The policy offers numerous benefits for education sector stakeholders. It envisages creating synergies in the curriculum across childhood care and education to school and the higher education segments. Major focus area of the policy is quality improvement in the learning outcomes. Another focus area is bringing assessment reforms, which remained much awaited change. Most importantly, NEP 2020 is expected to put India on the track to attain goals of 2030 agenda for sustainable development by promoting lifelong learning opportunity for all in the next decade to come.

It is rightly said that, "Higher Education (HE) is an important aspect of Education System (ES) in deciding the economy, social status, technology adoption, and healthy human behaviour in every country". The policy essentially aims at quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and positioning India as a global education hub. The focus is on providing flexible curriculum through an inter-disciplinary approach, creating multiple exit points in what would be a four year undergraduate programme catalysing research, improving faculty support and increasing internationalisation. The following table shows concern of policy towards higher education in particular

Table 1: Features, Impact Areas and Opportunities to Stakeholders

Features	Impact Areas	Opportunities to Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of vocational education with higher education • Enhanced equity and inclusion • Movement towards multi-disciplinary and integrated teacher education programmes • Conversion of existing standalone institutions to multi-disciplinary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) • Three-tiered institutional structure i.e. Research Universities, Teaching Universities, and Autonomous Colleges • Increasing scale of HEIs and promoting multi-disciplinary education • Encouragement to reputed international universities • Career progression pathways for faculty • Flexible curricular structure with multiple entry and exit points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality universities and colleges through large-scale consolidation • Institutional restructuring and consolidation • Focus on multi-disciplinary education • Accessible and inclusive higher education system • Enhanced equity and inclusion • Improving equity and access through ODL and online programmes • Quality and well incentivised faculty • Addressing faculty shortage and quality • Catalysing research through NRF • Promoting excellence through internationalisation • Internationalisation reforms • Accountability and transparency for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Governments Better outcome monitoring and resource sharing Improved budgetary efficiency enhancing educational outcomes • HEIs Ease of starting and operating HEIs through clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities Increased academic and administrative autonomy Opportunities of expansion and for increasing enrolments in terms of ODL and online programmes Development of own vocational courses by HEIs Enhanced opportunities for private HEIs • Faculty Better service environment for faculty Career advancement for faculty Minimal career gap and continuous learning for trainers through use of technology platforms Rationalisation teaching duties and greater opportunity to faculty to design curricular and pedagogical approaches • Students More opportunities to enter higher education system Greater flexibility for course choices Digitally stored credits for future reference Hands-on learning and practical exposure

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on Online Learning and Open Distance Learning (ODL) • Establishment of National Research Foundation (NRF) • Single regulator for all of higher education • Disclosure of information to public 	<p>governance Improved governance, efficiency and accountability</p>	<p>Improved transparency by HEIs Reduced pressure on students through single common entrance examination Greater exposure to Indian students through exchange programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry and other service providers Collaboration opportunity to industrial players in block chain, AI and predictive analytics System-wide ICT transformation leads to potential for private participation Opportunity for financial services and technology players Opportunity for industry multifaceted participation Opportunity for private sector to come ahead as expert in operation of National Education Technology Forum (NETF)
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Source: National Education Policy 2020 (MHRD)

Thus, in the light of features, impact areas and opportunities to stakeholders mentioned above, certain key points of NEP 2020 in respect of higher education can be derived as follows.

- The policy envisages for a new vision and architecture for higher education with large, well-resourced, vibrant multi-disciplinary institutions leading towards excellence.
- The policy provides for a broad-based liberal education through comprehensive but flexible curricular structures, creative combinations of study, integration of vocational education and multiple entry as well as exit points.
- The policy facilitates for voluntary and self-directed governance as institutional governance will be based on autonomy in terms of academic, administrative and financial.
- The policy seeks to ensure good regulation, as regulation will be light but tight, as the regulation will be in the hands of independent bodies to eliminate conflicts of interest.

Although, the policy document consists of and provides for certain guiding principles for its smooth implementation, there are some obstacles such as acceptance to the flexible model of higher education, acceptance to concept of multi-disciplinary institutions, need for greater public funding, need for rich digital infrastructure and the like, which cannot be neglected. Successful execution of the policy calls for adopting the principle guidelines given in the policy document, dramatic simplification of decision-making structures, re-prioritization of budgetary resources, automation and mechanisation in the system, change in the view point, and planned as well as systematic implementation of the new policy in months and years to come.

5. Concluding Remarks: We know that a well-defined, well-designed and comprehensive education policy is essential for a country at school, college, and university levels due to the reason that education leads to economic and social progress. Even today, adoption of appropriate education system is necessary in consideration of the prevailing conditions. Thus, to be precise, it is well accepted fact that a good education policy always leads to good and quality education in a country.

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is a welcome and ambitious re-imagining of India's education system into a modern, progressive and equitable one. Built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, NEP 2020 is aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SD). It aims to transform India into a vibrant knowledge society and global knowledge superpower by making both school and college education more holistic, flexible, multi-disciplinary, suited to 21st century needs. The policy calls for a large-scale implementation of a magnitude never before attempted anywhere in the world. The actual transformations will start from the academic year 2021-22 and will continue until the year 2030, where the first level of transformation is expected to be visible. The mission is aspirational but the successful implementation depends upon how would implementers understand the challenges and try to overcome it. It requires great deal of acceptance, commitment, optimism, change in attitude, and mind-set. No doubt, the Government of India took a giant leap forward by announcing its new education policy i.e. the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), almost three decades after the last major revision was made to the policy in 1986. Even, the drafting committee of NEP 2020 has made a great attempt to design the policy that considers diverse viewpoints, global best practices in education, field experiences and stakeholders' feedback. The mission is aspirational but the implementation roadmap will decide if this will truly foster an all-inclusive education that makes learners industry and future ready.

Summing up, the authors want to convey the message that the policy has come at the right time and the objective is very noble. But, there lies a world of difference between laying down a policy on paper and following it in spirit. The success of NEP 2020 and the pace of its implementation depend to a large extent on how successfully the government, universities and schools can tide over the practical challenges facing it. To realize the dreams it contains, we Indians must overcome substantial execution challenges in a sustained manner for years and decades to come. Lastly, to say, "*National Education Policy (NEP 2020) brings in ambitious changes that could transform the education system. But the key here is good implementation and execution*".

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