**New National Education Policy 2020**

**Higher Education**

Introduction:

* The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved the National Education Policy 2020 on July 29, 2020. This is the third Education Policy in India after independence (1968, 1986 and 2020).

* The Policy has four parts on: 1. School Education; 2. Higher Education; 3. Other Key Areas like Adult Education, Professional Education, Online Education etc., and 4. Implementation, Financing and Making the Policy happen.
* The new policy aims to pave the way for major transformational reforms in school and higher education systems in the country. This policy replaces the 34 your old National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986.
* The Cabinet also approved a proposal to rename the Ministry of Human Resource Development as the Ministry of Education.
* It is said that it is a policy for the 21st century.
* It is a framework to guide the development of education in the country.
* It aims to make India the global knowledge superpower ensuring equity and Inclusion.

**Highlights of the NEP:**

Let me address some of the salient features of the Policy in the Higher Education Sector:

1. **The policy views Quality Universities and Colleges** as part of the New and futuristic Vision for India’s Higher Education System. It points out some of the major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India; for example,
2. A veritably fragmented higher educational ecosystem;
3. Inadequate emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;

* (c) A rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization 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) Compromised 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.

2. **This policy envisions a complete overhaul and re-energizing of the higher education system** to overcome these challenges and thereby deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion. The following programmes are proposed:

(a) 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;

(b) A more multidisciplinary undergraduate education;

(c) **Faculty and Institutional autonomy**;

(d) Revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support for enhanced student experiences;

(e) Reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit-appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service;

(f) **Establishment of a National Research Foundation** to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research and to actively seed research in universities and colleges;

g) **Greater emphasis on Collaborative research with other HEIs, funding agencies and industries;**

(g) Governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;

(h) “Light but tight” regulation by a single regulator for higher education;

(i) Increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education;

j) Scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students;

k) Online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL); and all infrastructure and learning materials accessible and available to learners with disabilities.

1. **Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation:**

a) The policy envisages **three types of HEI – Research intensive universities, Teaching intensive universities and an Autonomous degree-granting College.**

b) The main thrust of this policy 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;**

c) By 2040, all higher education institutions (HEIs) shall aim to become multidisciplinary institutions and shall aim to have larger student enrolments preferably in the thousands,

d) The aim will be to increase the **Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.**

e) Academic Bank of Credits to be established to facilitate Transfer of Credits

g) Research Universities (MERUs), at par with IITs, IIMs, to be set up as models.

f) **Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** will be set up as a single overarching umbrella body the for entire higher education, excluding medical and legal education with four independent councils for funding, for accreditation, for regulation and standard setting.

g) **Affiliation of colleges is to be phased out in 15 years and a stage-wise mechanism is to be established for granting graded autonomy to colleges**. Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university.

4. **Towards a More Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education:**

- The structure and lengths of degree programmes shall be adjusted accordingly. The policy envisages multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification.

- M.Phil has been scrapped; **PhD program can be done after a Masters’ degree.**

- **The undergraduate degree will be of either 3 or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options** within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g., a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor’s degree after a 3-year programme.

5. **Optimal Learning Environments and Support for Students:**

- Curriculum, pedagogy, continuous assessment and student support are the cornerstones for quality learning.

- **Internationalization: India will be promoted as a global study destination providing premium education** at affordable costs thereby helping to restore its role as a Vishwa Guru.

- An International Students Office at each HEI hosting foreign students will be set up to coordinate all matters relating to welcoming and supporting students arriving from abroad.

- **Indian HEIs with exceptional qualitative performance shall be allowed to establish overseas branches.**

- Student Activity and Participation: **Students are the prime stakeholders** in the education system. **Vibrant campus life is essential** for high-quality teaching-learning processes. Financial support for students will be extended.

6. **Motivated, Energized, and Capable Faculty with commendable intellectual resource.**

- The most important factor in the success of higher education institutions is the **quality and engagement of its faculty.**

**7. Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education is emphaised in the policy.**

- making quality higher education opportunities available to all individuals.

**8. Transforming the Regulatory System of Higher Education**

- the regulatory system of higher education will ensure that the distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard setting will be performed by distinct, independent, and empowered bodies. These four structures will be set up as four independent verticals within one umbrella institution, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).

- Curbing Commercialization of Education: Multiple mechanisms with checks and balances will combat and stop the commercialization of higher education.

**9. Critical Analysis:**

a. What is the reason for announcing the policy during the Pandemic period while all educational institutions remained closed? A wounded dog does not bark? Is it an easy way out to pass the policy that too without any discussion in the parliament?

b. It is ‘old wine in a new bottle.’ Most of the ideas, programmes, and policies are either already in practice or being discussed among the academics.

c. Many of the policies are not time-bound. While on the one hand, the policy has been called visionary, it has also termed as exclusionary – it does not take into account the contributions and implications for minorities;

d. as observed by some, the policy recommends the need for better teaching and learning, better training of teachers and more meaningful evaluation system. But it does not provide a realistic way by which private or minority institutions can raise funds to meet their needs in their institutions.

e. It is ironic to note that the policy, on the one hand, lays the foundation for privatization of higher education, and on the other, claims to provide education for the marginalized and underprivileged groups.

f. India spent 2.9% of its GDP on education in 2018-19. Our economy going doldrums at the moment, how are we going to fund education? Can we realise the target of 6% as per the policy?

g. Currently, the Indian government’s expenditure on higher education goes extensively towards a small group of centrally funded elite institutions. And a vast majority of the graduates of these institutions end up working and living outside India. The policy seems to favour this class by introducing the 4 year UG degree to ensure that students can easily transfer their degrees and credits to universities abroad.

h. The policy remains vague on many issues and has several ambiguities and loose ends that are confusing and disturbing. As academics describe, the underlying philosophy of the new policy views education as a commodity rather than as service.

i. Prime Minister Modi’s tweet said that the NEP was based on “pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability” and that “May education brighten our nation and lead it to prosperity,” he added, like a prophet. However, a close look at the policy belies his claim.

The policy, aimed at universal quality education, has little to say on the subject affordability.

J. Education is under the Concurrent List. It is the responsibility of both – Union Government and State Governments. The policy is silent about the role and responsibility of the States to fulfill the mandate of quality, access and affordability.

k. While talking about the tribal areas, the policy introduces ‘Ashramshalas – a Sanskrit term. It does not recognize the distinct tribal cultural traditions. Questions are raised whether it is commensurate with ideology of the Sangh Parivar.

**Number of Higher Education Institutions in India:**

Graduates in India: 91 million (9.25% of Indian population)

Colleges of all types (2019): Around 48,498 (including Stand-alone Institutions)

12, 488 (UGC)

Autonomous Colleges: 747

Students: 38 million

Teachers: 1.55 million

Teacher/Student ratio: 1:24

Central Universities: 54

State Universities: 412

Deemed to be Universities: 124

Private Universities: 361

Total Universities: 951

- As of August 2020 (Source UGC)