

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF NEP 2020'S VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The educational policy in India since 1986 has been developing through various challenges and drawbacks. Some of the major problems currently faced by higher educational system in the country are like ineffective regulatory, sub-optimal governance and leadership, lack of vocational courses, limited autonomy for faculty and institution, etc. Hence, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is envisioned to bring a complete overhaul and re-energizing the higher education system in the country. The NEP 2020 has been attempted to deliver the educational system not only to be at par with the rest of the world educational processes but also to produce employable skills among the youth of the country. More importantly, higher education will be made easier, affordable and extensive to the youth of the country. Hence, against this massive regulation of higher educational policy in the country, the present paper is an attempt to depict the higher educational system and status in the hill State of Nagaland in order to highlight the difficulties and means to address the ambitious policy of higher education laid down in NEP 2020. The paper shows that the NEP 2020 is a massive road map to develop the higher education; however, the policy lacks its strategy how to overhaul its system in rural and the hill state like the State of Nagaland where infrastructural, topographic, cultural, governing system, etc are diverse in its nature. Hence, opportunities and challenges concerning its implementation at grass root level, considering local conditions, needs extensive deliberation in order to make the ambitious NEP 2020 happen sooner than later.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary, oppurtunities, challenges.*

Introduction: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri. Narendra Modi after a gap of 34 years since National Education Policy 1986. The first national education policy (NEP) in independent India was announced in the year 1968 when Smt. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. After which, the second National Education Policy was introduced after a gap of 18 years i.e. in 1986 by the then Prime

Minister of India Shri. Rajiv Gandhi. However, unlike earlier NEPs, which were incremental reforms in education policy, the NEP 2020 is an overhaul of the educational policy to be implemented in the country. Severe drawbacks of previous NEPs were addressed in the new NEP 2020. From being hailed as ground-breaking and long overdue reforms in the education sector to criticism of earlier NEPs on the ground like “unrealistic, impractical and

unspecific”, the new National Education Policy (NEP) has met with mixed responses from academicians and education experts (Khan, 2020). Some of the major problems in the current educational policy, especially in regard to higher education as laid down in NEP 2020 clause 9.2 are such as severe fragmentation of higher educational ecosystem; less emphasis on development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes; rigidity in disciplines; limited access for socio-economically disadvantaged areas; limited autonomy; inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management; less emphasis on researches; sub-optimal governance and leadership of higher education institutions (HEIs); ineffective regulatory system and large affiliation system with low standards (NEP, 2020).

With a view to improve the lacunae in the educational system in the country, the NEP 2020 attempts to build a nation with well-equipped educational foundation. Aithel and Aithel (2020) has stated that “being the first education policy of the 21st century, National Education Policy (NEP-2020) India has a challenge and hence goal to lift the country as a developed country by supporting developmental imperatives according to 4th goal of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. The NEP 2020, hence, brought out a framework for educational system in the country starting from the age 3 years onwards. The present system of 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new pedagogical and curricular restructuring of 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18. The present three (3) years degree course of undergraduate has been replaced by four (4) year

degree course with multiple exit formula and introduction of research studies. Further, M.Phil programme has been discontinued in the NEP 2020. The discontinuation of M.Phil programme will enable the students to acquire Ph.D in lesser time. Hence, drastic changes have been introduced in NEP 2020.

Against the drawbacks found in the present educational system (NEP 1986) that produced a large number of graduates without skill and non-employability education, the NEP 2020 focuses that the higher education in the country shall enable to produce skilled youth in the country. In view of this, the vocational courses are being introduced widely in the curriculum and focus is also learning is concentrating on students rather than teachers and institutional centric. The NEP 2020 envisioned a complete overhaul and re-energising of higher education system to overcome challenges and also to produce high-quality education with equity and inclusion. The basic aims of NEP 2020 for higher education are thus laid down in its clause 9.3. Major aims of higher education policies are such as to develop multidisciplinary universities and colleges; more faculty and institutional autonomy; revamping pedagogy in teaching process; to enhance leadership position and career progression based on merits; establishing of strong research foundation for higher education; HEIs to be governed by qualified board of governors; the system is to be “light but tight” regulations; and increased access and inclusion through a wide range of measures to give avenues for students to acquire education (NEP, 2020). The policy is based on the pillars of “access, equity, quality, affordability, accountability” and will transform India into a “vibrant knowledge hub” (Roy, 2020)

The policy is also envisioned that by 2040, all higher education institutions (HEIs) shall become multidisciplinary with thousands of students. The liberal approach in multidisciplinary setting in selection of courses would bring the much-needed global format to Indian higher education (Khan, 2020). To achieve this, all HEIs will first plan to become a multidisciplinary institution by 2030 and then gradually increase student strength to the desired levels. The policy stated that by 2030, there shall be at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district. Moreover the gross enrolment ratio in higher education shall be increased to 50% in 2035. All the single stream HEIs will be phased out over time and will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or part of vibrant multidisciplinary HEI clusters. And hence, all HEIs will gradually move towards full autonomy in academics administrative and affiliated colleges system will be phased out within the next fifteen years.

However, the NEP 2020 has come under severe scrutiny from various quarters that a sweeping change in higher education may not be necessary because the current institutions like UGC, AICTE are well organized and managing the higher educational system well in the country (Chopra, 2020). Also, according to Mint (2020), the devil lies in implementation of the policy. The NEP 2020 proposes “light but tight” regulation for higher education; however, the complete definition of “light but tight” is not known and purely left to the discretion of the authority (Mint 2020). Further, the proposed NEP 2020 is an attempt to destroy the federal structure of educational system by implementing the policy which mostly contains the central government plans rather than the relevance of

the state and social structural system (Kamakar, 2021). The NEP 2020 has come at the right time with noble objectives. However, there lies a world of difference between laying down a policy on paper and following it in spirit. The success of NEP 2020 will, therefore, depend on how implementation is done successfully by the concerned agencies (Sawant & Sankpal, 2021).

In view of the above concept and aims of NEP 2020 in higher education in the country, the present paper is to study the opportunities and challenges of the policy with special reference to the hill and rural state of Nagaland. The present study shall thus focus on some of the basic aspects of the NEP 2020 laid down under its clause 9.3. The study shall thus enable to feature the opportunities and problems faced by rural areas as well as hill states in other parts of the country sharing similar kind of problems and difficulties. The study is based on secondary data and also the observations of the authors with respect to opportunities and problems of higher education in Nagaland have been put into account for discussions.

Nagaland is a state under Indian union since its statehood inauguration in 1963. Nagaland is a rural state where about 68 percent of its population lives in rural areas (Census of India 2011). Nagaland is bordering with the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, and the country of Myanmar. Also, Nagaland is a hill state where the people of Nagaland live in the hill areas except Dimapur and Niuland districts and few localities adjoining Assam. Therefore, the topography of Nagaland is quite different from that of the plain areas of India. Severe terrain and unique topography have made the state machineries quite

challenging in administering the State. Moreover, the people of Nagaland are mostly tribals where the cultural diversity is huge. Each tribe possesses distinct cultures in habits, languages, etc. in its social set up though affinity is observable in various aspects. The sense of community life is strong amongst the Nagas.

Higher Education in Nagaland at a glance:

There are 16 districts and 17 recognised tribes in Nagaland. The higher education system

in Nagaland is mostly concentrated in urban areas like Dimapur and Kohima. Out of 16 districts, four (4) districts do not have Government higher educational institution (HEI). Five (5) districts have two or more HEIs and only five districts have science education. Eleven districts have training institutes like ITIs, ITCs, DICs, etc.

Table 1: Higher Education Institution (HEIs) position in Nagaland (excluding universities)

Sl. No.	Parameters	Position
1	No. of districts	16
2	No. of district with HEIs	12
3	No. of districts without HEIs	4
4	No. of districts with 2 or more HEIs	8
5	No. of districts with science education in HEIs	6
6	No. of districts with ITIs, ITCs, DICs, etc	11

Source: Directorate of Higher Education, Nagaland, Statistical handbook of Nagaland 2021

There are six universities including 3 (three) private run universities namely; St. Joseph University, Global Open University and ICFAI, and 3 (three) Government/public run universities namely Nagaland University (Central), IGNOU and National Institute of Technology (NIT). There are 65 secular colleges, out of which 62 (95%) are arts colleges. Amongst the 65 colleges, 18 colleges offered commerce and science programme. There are three autonomous colleges including one Government and two

private colleges. Out of 65 secular colleges, 52 are located in three districts, namely Kohima, Dimapur and Chumoukedima. Also, there are 22 different courses offering in higher education in Nagaland. Besides higher education, there are 42 different training institutes in Nagaland such as Industrial Training Institutes/Centres, District Industries Centre, Sub-District Industries Centre, Nagaland Tools and Training Centre, handlooms and craft centres imparting trainings and vocational courses.

Table 2: Status of HEIs in Nagaland

Sl. No.	Parameters	Govt.	Private	Total
1	No. of Universities	3	3	6
2	No. of Colleges	15	50	65
3	No. of Colleges offering Arts Course	12	50	62
4	No. of Colleges offering Commerce Course	2	16	18
5	No. of Colleges offering Science Course	4	14	18
6	No. of Colleges offering both Arts & Commerce Courses	2	8	10
7	No. of Colleges offering both Arts & Science Courses	3	-	3
8	No. of Colleges offering Arts, Commerce & Science Courses	0	6	6
9	No. of Colleges of Teachers Education	2	6	8
10	No. of Autonomous Colleges	1	2	3
11	No. of ITC/ITIs/DICs/Sub-DICs, etc.	42		42
12	No. of various courses offered under Higher Education (Under Graduate) in Nagaland			22

Source: Directorate of Higher Education, Nagaland, Statistical Handbook of Nagaland, 2021.

Opportunities and Challenges: A critical Analysis: The visions for higher education enshrined in NEP 2020 with regard to opportunities, issues and challenges being faced by the state of Nagaland are discussed as follows:

a. Establishing of Multidisciplinary HEIs: Multidisciplinary higher educational institutions are one of the main focal points in the NEP 2020. It states that “India has a long tradition of holistic and multidisciplinary learning, from universities such as Takshashila and Nalanda, to the extensive literatures of India combining subjects across fields. Ancient Indian literary works such as Banabhatta's *Kadambari* described a good education as knowledge of the 64 Kalaas or arts; and amongst these 64 arts were not only subjects but also scientific fields.” The policy also aims that all such HEIs shall become at par with those IITs. Moreover, such multidisciplinary HEIs shall incorporate research as its major curriculum. The policy aims

to establish at least one Multidisciplinary HEI in each district or near the district. In Nagaland as discussed above, there are only 22 different courses offered for undergraduate studies; moreover, the HEIs are mostly concentrated in urban areas. Also, 95% of the colleges are arts colleges in the State with the most common subjects like English, Political Science, History, Economics, Education, Sociology, Philosophy and Psychology. Therefore, in many cases, students are unable to study what they are actually interested but forced to learn due to shortages of courses in HEIs as rightly pointed out in the NEP 2020. Hence, establishing multidisciplinary HEIs with high standards to that of IITs will surely be a revamping of higher education in the State. Also, such standard of education will definitely enable to equip the youths of the country to be employable, self-sustaining and most importantly an asset of the society.

b. *Multidisciplinary HEIs in every district:* In a state like Nagaland, most of the HEIs are located in urban areas. About 80% (52) of the HEIs in Nagaland are located in the districts of Kohima and Dimapur as discussed above. Hence, the students of rural districts have been denied higher education due to financial constraints as well as the factors attached within families. Therefore, envisioning of establishing such multidisciplinary HEIs in all the districts would greatly benefit the people of the State.

c. *Faculty and institution autonomy:* Faculty and institution autonomy is another vision enshrined in the NEP 2020. It states that “a stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established.” Autonomy given to faculty and institution would mean to give more liberty to them through a proper transparent system. Yet, in this regard the situation in the State like Nagaland is far from imagining as the institutions in the rural areas are hardly offering 5-6 courses and manned by less than 20 faculty members (ANGCTA, 2022). Therefore, giving autonomy to such HEIs would do more harm than good because the institution is not equipped themselves in terms of human resources although accreditation was carried out and graded transparently.

d. *Research sponsorship through NRF:* The NEP proposed a strong research foundation for higher education in the country by way of introducing research funding institution called as National Research Foundation (NRF). The HEIs are also encouraged to be research-intensive institutes by introducing and taking up more research activities. Current research sponsoring

agencies are also to continue but the NEP suggests NRF to be above all research funding agencies which will select research proposal through peer-review system. Hence, the introduction of NRF to be placed above the existing funding agencies will take a longer route to award research projects; moreover, it will make the system more complicated and difficult. Therefore, there are chances that the HEIs in rural areas will face more challenges in receiving such awards for research projects.

e. *Board of Governance for HEIs:* The higher education in the State is presently governed by the State Government through the Department of Higher Education except those of the central universities which are directly under the purview of UGC, AICTE, etc. The vision of setting up of Board of Governors for each HEIs to govern HEIs aims to improve the working procedure. However, an institution to be governed by its governors will need to have a well-established organization in terms of infrastructure, academics and human resources. Also, if the HEIs are to be managed by Board of Governors (BoGs), it must be made uniform for all HEIs in the State especially those under the control of the State Government. Unless that is done, uniformity in the system of higher education as well as management of faculty will have practical difficulties. In this regard, the scenario of HEIs in Nagaland is far from reaching its position as many (government) colleges in rural areas are managed by only few faculty members with very poor state of infrastructure. Hence, in order to enable this vision possible, it will need to have a big push of development in terms of physical infrastructure and recruitment of qualified faculty and board members.

f. Vague definition on “light but tight”:

The policy for higher education to be under “light but tight” regulatory system is under severe suspicion. The definition of “light but tight” is left to the discretion of the central government. This would damage the federal structure of educational system which is currently placed under concurrent list. India being a country of unity in diversity, there are various differences in terms of requirements of the respective societies. Hence, the 'light' regulation for one section of the society may become a burden of another. Yet, if it is made 'tight' for all sections to abide by the regulation, then it will definitely harm that section of society where the regulation is not comfortable in their social set up. Hence, “light but tight” regulatory in the higher education may not do justice in a diverse society like India and for that matter a tribal society like Nagaland where each tribe has distinct cultural and social set-ups.

g. Practical Challenges on online education & ODL system: Online and Open Distance Learning (ODL) have also featured as a major aspect in NEP 2020. This policy aims to bring education to the individual where an individual is unable to come to the HEIs physically. The NEP 2020 also envisioned that education acquired through online and ODL will also have such equivalent standard of institutional education. However, the given infrastructure and through the experience of Covid-19 pandemic situation, it is observed that the education acquired through online education is highly questionable. Therefore, to make this system a high-quality standard, strong communication infrastructural facilities need to be established. Until such time is established, the rural and remote areas will not be able realize its

objectives as envisioned in the policy.

h. Common entrance for UG admission:

The policy suggests that the admission to higher education institution across the country be made through common entrance (CUET). However, the standard of school and higher education varies from place to place even within India. Therefore, admission to HEIs through common entrance may deny the students studying from rural areas to pursue higher studies as the standard of education acquired from such locality is lower and thus will not be able to compete with those students from urban areas. The other aspect of CUET is the practical difficulties that is previewed, because of regional imbalances in terms of infrastructure and technological issues. On the other hand, the policy is envisioned to increase enrollment in higher education in the country and also to bring education to an individual level through online and ODL means but this common entrance for admission to higher education may defeat the objective of education for all.

Conclusion: Although the country is thriving towards a higher order of society in terms of economic, political and educational aspects, the vastness of the population and diversified regional and social settings does not allow smooth flow of policies and programmes at the right time. The present NEP 2020 envisages an educational policy to push India towards world super power in the field of education. However, the implementation of the new education policy will be a great challenge, especially for the states that are still lacking behind in development aspects like infrastructure, connectivity, faculty position, single discipline/ stream institutions, funding difficulties, etc. Also, the remoteness of

the state and institutions in delivering quality services to the citizens are of great concern. This problem puts the rural institutions at a peril for its survival. Furthermore, except a negligible number of institutions where two or more streams are running, the rest of the institutions are not in a position to cope up with the changing demands of the time. In spite of the best policies and efforts to make the NEP 2020 happen, it will be a herculean task for the stake holders to fulfill its requirements in the line of standard that is envisioned in the policy document. It is a known fact that “Free and Compulsory Primary

Education in India has been enshrined in the Constitution of India since its inception, but this vision has also not been able to achieve even in the past 75 years of its independence. It has been upgraded to 'Right to Education' policy since 2009. But it is still a herculean task for the country to carry on the policy in the right perspective practically. Similarly, it is also doubtful that the NEP 2020 will fulfil its vision in totality within the near future. However, all the responsible stakeholders should sincerely work to make the vision happen in reality.

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