ROADMAP FOR HOLISTIC IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY–2020

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After thirty-four years, the National Education Policy–2020 has come with a bounty of initiatives and innovations. NEP-2020 is a very comprehensive document covering the continuum of Early Childhood Care and Education, School Education and Higher Education. For Higher Education, the policy recommended several measures to improve the quality of education in universities and colleges, institutional restructuring and consolidation, move towards holistic and multi-disciplinary education, creating optimum learning environment and support for students, equity and inclusion, teacher education, quality academic research and transforming regulatory system. The establishment of National Research Foundation is one of the much-needed initiatives to make Indian higher education world-class. Similarly, there are many recommendations which need befitting implementation.

PRELUDE

Higher Educational Institutions in India are striving hard to initiate many corrective measures in order to make themselves comparable with the global standards. They have been implementing the recommendations made by the Government, Regulatory Bodies and the National Policies on Education which were released way back and are outdated in their approach. However, after thirty-four years, the National Education Policy–2020(NEP—2020) has come with a bounty of initiatives and innovations. The NEP—2020 is a very comprehensive document, covering the continuum of Early Childhood Care and Education, School Education and Higher Education. For

Higher Education, the policy gave several recommendations on improving the quality of education in universities and colleges, institutional restructuring and consolidation, move towards holistic and multi-disciplinary education, creating optimum learning environment and support for students, equity and inclusion, teacher education, quality academic research, transforming regulatory system, etc.

The document, under the other key aspects, emphasised on professional education, adult education and lifelong learning, promotion of Indian languages, arts and culture, technology integration, and online and digital education. In order to materialise the recommendations, the policy document also suggests the need for strengthening the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), financial resources and the method of implementation. Among these, certain recommendations had their presence in the earlier policy documents also, but were never implemented properly, but most of them are novel and unique which are framed keeping in view the present and situation. In this article, a serious attempt has been made to suggest a few strategies for successful implementation of the policy.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NEP-2020

Strategies to Make Education Holistic

Holistic education is the widely accepted concept in higher education. Universities can come out with different models to make higher education holistic in order to ensure overall development of the students to make them happier, cohesive and balanced individuals who can contribute to the progress and prosperity of the nation. This is possible if the universities develop their curriculum following the recommendations of NEP--2020. As per NEP—2020, "holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings -intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century capacities

in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences, and professional, technical, and vocational fields; an ethic of social engagement; soft skills, such as communication, discussion and debate; and rigorous specialization in a chosen field or fields. Such a holistic education shall be, in the long term, the approach of all undergraduate programmes, including those in professional, technical, and vocational disciplines." Many universities might have already developed some models of holistic education. It will be in the interest of the nation as well as other higher education Institutions if the HEIs which have developed the holistic model of education on the basis of the recommendations and guidelines of NEP-2020, display it on their institutional website. This will help all the other HEIs to prepare their models in a fast pace.

Strategies for Evolving Multidisciplinary Higher Education Institutions

As highlighted in the NEP–2020 document, there should be a paradigm shift from single discipline or stand-alone institutions to multidisciplinary institutions. NEP-2020 recommends, "Large multidisciplinary universities and colleges will facilitate the move towards high-quality holistic and multidisciplinary education. Flexibility in curriculum and novel and engaging course options will be on offer to students, in addition to rigorous specialization in a subject or subjects. This will be encouraged by increased faculty and institutional autonomy in setting curricula. Pedagogy will have an increased emphasis on communication, discussion, debate, research, and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking," (NEP—2020). Multidisciplinary education will enable students of higher education to have a broader and more comprehensive perspective of different dimensions of the knowledge of the course they are pursuing. This includes professional, technical, and vocational dimensions as well. To make this concept work, UGC and other academic bodies should constitute expert committees and come out with specialized curriculum and action plan that can be tried out in general education and subsequently be implemented in professional higher education Institutions.

Developing Effective Curriculum and Pedagogy

The quality of higher education mainly depends on the curriculum designing/ planning and teaching learning process. Higher education institutions should be given more autonomy for developing the functional curriculum and should be properly monitored by accrediting agencies. There should be a separate department/cell for curriculum designing at the university level, in the light of the expected 4-year degree courses under the nomenclature, Central Curriculum and Pedagogy Directorate (CCPD). This directorate can prepare initial/ experimental curriculum involving curriculum experts from outside India as well, for both UG and PG courses, based on multidisciplinary approach. The CCPD can work with General Education Council and also with National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) to frame curricular policies.

Establishing National Research Foundation: A Much-Needed Initiative

Research is an integral component of any higher educational institution. HEIs in all developed nations have given primary importance to research, which in turn helped them to find solutions and contribute for the welfare of   the society. On the other hand, in most of the higher education institutions in India, research is offered for degree's sake. In majority of researches conducted at university level, the findings and results do not have functional applications. Since there is no insistence on application, students also take Research casually. Are our researchers not capable of doing functional and need-based research? The answer lies in many factors such as lack of financial support, supervision and monitoring, and conducive atmosphere not leading to the development of research culture in the universities.

As research was not a priority area, required finance and other support was not rendered to HEIs for strengthening the research component in the universities.   There are however, exceptions like Indian Institute of Science (IISc), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), etc. Recently, the institutions like Indian Institutes of

Science Education and Research (IISERs) and National Institute of Science Education and Research (NISER) have come up. In Indian universities, research dimension did not get the required importance so the country is lagging behind in many ways in comparison to other countries.

At this juncture, NEP—2020 recommendation for establishment of National Research Foundation (NRF) has come as a great redeemer not only for the HEIs, but for the whole nation. NRF should be an apex body under the direct control of the central government. It should have experts from all over India as well from reputed foreign universities, representing various disciplines. Subject specific steering committees should be formed. Short as well as long range objectives should be framed along with strict implementation of rules. Funds should be reserved on par with International Research Forums. There should be a database of available funds. A Standard Assessment Tool can be developed for justified allocation of funds in a systematic way. To make it convenient to all the states, State Research Foundations with same rules and regulations be established as research is one area where there should be no discrimination between State and National universities or public and private universities. There should be separate Central Research Auditing Body (CRAB) to monitor the activities as well as the finances of the Research Foundation.

Strategies for Ensuring Equity and Access to All

Among the larger section of the student population who have no access to higher education includes women, economically weaker section, tribal students, rural students and students with distinctly diversified. No doubt, our central and state governments have made great provisions; however, especially for Socially and Economically Deprived Groups (SEDGS) students aspiring for higher education and international education, more scholarships should be introduced for which there is an urgent need to review and restructure the schemes both at the central as well as the state level.

Mainstreaming Vocational Education

One more area where our country did not make any strides is Vocational Education. Economy of our country is suffering to a great extent due to this misstep. Whereas, Vocational Education should be imparted from school level itself, our country never brought Vocational Education to mainstream education. As evident from the 12th five-year plan (2012-2017), there are less than 5 per cent of students who receive formal vocational education in the age group of 19-24 years whereas in USA it is 52 per cent, Germany it is 75 per cent and South Korea it is 96 per cent. Vocational education in India needs a revolutionary change in many dimensions ranging avenues of imparting vocational education to the mindset of people. The courses need to be attractive as well as suitable keeping the abilities, needs, interests and requirements of the students. In this regard, it is very much necessary to introduce special programmes and curricula that help the students to specialise in some courses according to their areas of interest.

To this effect, it is necessary to bolster vocational education from its early stages via a differentiation of curricula or the creation of alternatives.

Related to the previous point, there is another series of recommendations that focus on the need to review the programmes at the entry level in order to include students that could potentially benefit from this kind of education. In this way, it is not necessary for students to have been graduated from primary or secondary school in order to take advantage of vocational schooling, and benefit from its positive effects. In this respect, it is recommended to:

- establish Rural Vocational Education Centers (RVEC) in collaboration with (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) involving Industrial/Business Association;

- include the vocational training programmes, practical work experience according to the students' professional objectives which has real work value and work culture; and

- develop assessment tools to establish periodic assessment systems for the training programs as well as vocational programmes.

Establishing Efficient Governance and Regulatory System

The roles and responsibilities of regulatory bodies are very crucial in order to monitor the quality of higher education institutions—starting from admissions to examinations. As evident from the functioning of the existing regulatory bodies, the monitoring mechanisms are not totally transparent. This has led to malfunctioning of higher education Institutions. As mentioned in the policy document, "The regulatory systems are in need of a complete overhaul in order to re-energies the higher education sector and enable it to believe". Moreover, Indian Higher Education System is unpopular for being over-regulated and under-governed. To resolve the grave governance issues, the policy document, has suggested four regulatory bodies to be set up as four independent verticals working within one umbrella institution called Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). namely:

1. The National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC);

2. National Accreditation Council (NAC);

3. Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC); and

4. General Education Council (GEC).

These four regulatory bodies will ensure the distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard setting. However, for efficient governance of higher education institutions, the structure and functioning of these bodies are to be well-defined, based on a good legal framework so that implementation becomes easy. There should be proper networking of these regulatory bodies with the HEIs of the country. Experienced academicians and administrators who have sound knowledge of the ground realities to be appointed or nominated to these bodies.

Role of National Assessment and Accreditation Council

The present National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) can be renamed as National Accreditation Council. Based on twenty-five years of rich experience in the field of Assessment and Accreditation, it will gear up to a transformed role under the guidelines of Higher Education Council of India (HECI). Policy states that NAC can act like Meta Accreditation body in charge of accreditation of institutions whose accreditation process will be based on:

- Basic norms

- Public self-disclosure

- Good governance

- Outcomes

In this regard, NAC can assume the parental role with new regulations and assist the Accreditation Institutions (recognised accreditation) to work out the robust system of graded accreditation which will specify phased benchmarks for all higher education institutions to achieve set levels of quality: self-governance and autonomy. NAC can work with NHERC to regulate the quality of higher education.

Ensuring Rigor in Appointment of Faculty Members

The existing method of appointing faculty members has many ambiguities which need to be removed for creating a sound higher education system. There should be a separate Teachers Appointment Cell (TAC) – both at the central and state levels with very stringent recruitment criteria. The cell should consist of academicians of integrity, specialized in different subject areas. To appoint faculty for the teaching profession, eligibility tests like National Eligibility Test (NET) or State Level Eligibility Tests (SLET) should be made compulsory. The tests should be standardised with proper weightage to both content and pedagogy. Demonstration of classroom teaching and research abilities should also be made compulsory.

Strategies For Promoting Indian Languages

India is a multi-linguistic and multi-religious country. Thousands of years of Indian culture is seen both in materialistic and non materialistic forms, such as traditions, customs, literature, arts and so on. One of our objectives of education is to transmit our Indian literature and culture for the benefit of the individuals and also the society. There are more than 220 languages in the country. UNESCO has declared that 197 Indian languages are under 'endangerment'. Hence, there is a need to come out with an action plan. The suggested ones are:

- Establishment of All India Pradhikar for Translation (AIPT) of useful ancient work of great scholars from Indian Languages.
- Language policy for higher educational institutions, to encourage the nurturing of Indian languages.
- Developing language related Apps Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for self translation to understand the literature of the other languages.

Realising the Component of Internationalisation

Internationalisation has brought a lot of mobility for students to move within the country as well as outside the country. Indology, Indian languages, AYUSH system of medicine, yoga, art, music, history and Indian culture attracts number of foreign students to India to pursue their studies. Some of the Indian universities and Institutes of National Importance with their good Infrastructure, quality of education and less cost are attracting many foreign students. They can be upgraded to Class I universities.

In order to have more sustainability in this process, some of the universities and Institutes of National Importance should be given higher status through legislative framework, more funds, greater autonomy, high standard infrastructure. Apart from these, high ranked foreign universities can have collaborations with our universities. This will facilitate the main motto of Internationalisation of Education, so that many foreign students comfortably take admissions in Indian Universities.

CONCLUSION

The NEP–2020 is an extremely comprehensive document and has created a lot of scope to re-structure and revamp Indian education system on par with some of the advanced countries. There is a big challenge for academicians and policy makers to convert ideas into actions which bring significant changes and adds to the knowledge economy of the country.

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