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Challenges and issues in the education system of modern India: A review

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Abstract

Education is the sole key to the social and economic development of a country. As a result, a futuristic and well-precise education policy has become extremely essential and indispensable. The only way to ensure success through the implementation of such progressive educational policies is to still them in young minds in their years of development and moulding. No doubt, Education has attained a key position in the knowledge society both at the national and global levels as well. Over the last two decades, India has remarkably transformed its higher education landscape. It has created widespread access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all levels. With well-planned expansion and a student-centric learning-driven model of education, India has not only bettered its enrolment numbers but has dramatically enhanced its learning outcomes. A differentiated three-tiered university system, where each tier has a distinct strategic objective – has enabled universities to build on their strengths and cater to different categories of educational needs. Further, with the effective use of technology, India has been able to resolve the longstanding tension between excellence and equity. India has also undertaken large-scale reforms to better faculty-student ratios by making teaching an attractive career path, expanding the capacity for doctoral students at research universities, and delinking educational qualifications from teaching eligibility. However, the challenges faced are immense and far-reaching. This paper focuses on identifying the key challenges like the demand-supply gap, quality education, research and development, faculty shortage, etc. in India's education sector.

Keywords: Higher education, quality education, untrained faculty, technology, UGC

Introduction

In India, the education sector is one of the developing sectors as it offers a huge untapped market in regulated and non-regulated segments due to low literacy rates, high concentration in urban areas, and growing per capita income. Higher education is assuming an upward significance for developing countries, especially countries including India which are experiencing service-led growth. Higher education is all about generating knowledge encouraging critical thinking and imparting skills relevant to society and determined by its needs. Education general and higher education in particular, is a highly nation-specific activity, determined by national culture and priorities. The growth of India's higher educational institutions has indeed been outstandingly rapid should form the four guiding principles while planning for There will be four guiding principles i.e., access, equity, accountability, and quality which should consider while planning for higher education development in India in the twenty-first century. Demand – supply gap. Indian society puts a premium on knowledge and its acquisition -spending on education has figured as the single largest outlay for middle-class households after food and groceries. With its rapidly expanding middle class, India's private expenditure on education is set to increase manifold.

Challenges to execute NEP 2020 in schools and colleges

Implementing the National Education Policy can be quite cumbersome. In July 2020 India revealed its first and most contemporary education policy of the 21st century, 34 years after the second one in 1986. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 tries to address various crises present in India's education system. For the completion of one year of the NEP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said “We are entering the 75th year of Independence. In a way, implementation of NEP has become a vital part of this occasion. This will play a key role in creating a new India and future-ready youth” (Aithal & Aithal, 2020) ^[1].

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The Education Minister of India Dharmendra Pradhan called NEP 2020 a "visionary education policy for the 21st century through which India is harnessing the capabilities of each student, universalizing education, building capacities, and transforming the learning landscape in the country". He added that the NEP would make education in India comprehensive, impartial and affordable, accessible to all. Let us now observe the progress along with the challenges.

1. Changing the present education is quite difficult as it involves changing the mind-set of schools, which are still hung-over from the British and Industrial age. It would need two or more generations of parents, teachers, grandparents, and educators to completely alter the mind-set. A generation that is focused on STEM education would appreciate and give way to NEP. The corporate world would in return change their requirements accordingly facilitating the process.
2. Re-thinking about assessments is also an extremely difficult impediment. The boards that are responsible for conducting exams for the students leaving school would have to re-think the parameters for assessments that would favour the education system and bring out the best in the students. Schools need to come up with new textbooks that align with the new teaching content (Jewel Hoque 2018) ^[6].
3. Conversion of affiliated colleges into Autonomous Colleges: There are a great number of affiliated colleges to the public universities that have very small infrastructure and have only very few courses and can support not more than 300-350 students. It is impossible for these colleges to convert to autonomous colleges as they cannot expand their disciplines. UGC has passed mandatory instructions that the affiliated colleges should have at least 5 acres of land and it is impossible for many colleges to follow the criteria. It would be an unimaginable hassle for these colleges, they would either have to secure bigger land or stop their operations.
4. The NEP is entirely dependent on the extent of cooperation between the Centre and states. Even though the NEP has been drafted by the Union government with inputs provided by all stakeholders including the governments of the different States, its implementation and success greatly depends on the active cooperation of the state government. Since most of the services-related education is controlled by the state governments, the Centre has to develop a skilful plan to spread the principles of cooperative federalism and decentralization while implementing significant initiatives. This might be the most difficult task owing to the sharpening of political polarisation in recent times and the decline of trust between the Central Government and states. The states that are being ruled by Opposition have raised strong protests against the NEP and its implementation. For example, the government of Tamil Nadu blatantly refused to implement the NEP and other opposition-ruled states can follow the trend (Boyce, 2003) ^[2].

In order to successfully execute the most important initiatives one would need adequate financial resources for decades. The country has to increase the funds spent on education to realize the goals of NEP. This should be at least 6 percent of GDP. This can be quite dreadful keeping in

mind past promises of the 1968 National Education policy that had also recommended 6 percent of GDP be allocated towards education. And their actual realisation but only 3 percent was spent in all these years. The most ironic thing is that the union budget allocation for education in the year the NEP was launched was reduced. The education budget took a hit and was reduced from INR 99,311 crore in 2020-21 to INR 93,224 crore in 2021-22 which is at least 6%. This is because the government was trying to fight the deadly COVID-19 pandemic and all countries across the world experienced economic distress. Even today, there is no clear roadmap to how India would be able to raise such gigantic sums of financial resources for education amidst the crisis (Ray, 2001) ^[8]. Funds will also be required for building schools and colleges across the country, adding and expanding the existing ones, appointing new teachers and professors, and for operational expenses such as providing free breakfast to school children, books, stationeries, and fulfilling other learning needs. Though the new NEP can be acclaimed to be an important move, the move was made in haste. India was already struggling for months with lockdowns induced by the pandemic. An important policy like this required parliamentary discussions; and should have undergone a decent parliamentary debate considering all the diverse opinions and options before committing to this (Robert & John, 1995) ^[9].

The policy has quite a few Pedagogical limitations too. The policy talks about flexibility, options, and experimentation. For the education system of higher institutions, the policy recognizes that there is a diversity of pedagogical needs. It would be a disaster if there is a mandatory option within single institutions, as structuring a curriculum for a classroom that has both one-year diploma students and four-year degree students would be quite a daunting task. The language barrier is among the biggest topics that are up for debate in the policy. The NEP focuses on and seeks to enable home language learning up to class five to see improvements in the students in local languages. Though it can be said that this goal is noble and empowers the local language heritage of India. But we all know that English is a mandate for social and economic growth and economic mobility. And if the foundations are not strong for these foreign languages it might be quite difficult for the students to be accustomed to the language later in their lives (Jewel Hoque 2018) ^[6].

Current challenges in Indian education system

Since there was no curriculum, it was different in different schools. Pre-school education has become just a means of entering prestigious institutions without focusing on learning solutions. There has been a decrease in attendance in government schools, learning outcomes are very poor, learning to increase the number of the poor and also learning about the poverty gap (as the eighth regular student cannot read a sentence in English, and cannot do the basic addition), mainly due to the lack of a detention policy in RTE Act (V S. Athawar, 2015) ^[10].

There has been a decrease in attendance in government schools, learning outcomes are very poor, learning to increase in the number of the poor, and also learning about the poverty gap, mainly due to the lack of a detention policy in the RTE Act. There is no link between higher education and secondary education, and students are not prepared for higher education with regard to skills, because there are a

large number of training institutes for entrance exams that exploit students. Lack of awareness regarding reservation seats to economically weaker sections in private schools and improper implementation of it by many schools. Lack of computer knowledge among school children in government schools. Technology is growing up, but our educational system has not been fully developed. We are not able to list one university in the top 100 universities in the world. Various governments changed during these six decades. They tried to reinforce the educational system and implement various educational policies but they were not enough to set an example for the universe. UGC is constantly working and focusing on the quality of education in the higher education sector. The learning outcomes are very poor mainly because of a lack of qualified teachers; there is no monitoring tool for teacher knowledge once he/she became a teacher (Nanda, 2017) ^[7]. Lack of IT and vocational courses at the secondary level, Lack of connection between higher education and secondary education and it is not preparing students for higher education with respective skills, because of it there is a huge number of coaching institutes for entrance exams exploiting students.

Class Size

Large class sizes are widespread in the pre-primary school education system. With classrooms filled with students and teachers insufficient to provide enough individual attention, the student learning experience is scarce. Primary school teachers try to manage classes for 50 to 60 students in some school regions across the country. Quality of student intake: Another important factor affecting the quality of education is the level of students admitted to universities. Undergraduate students in India are students who have graduated from upper secondary school (for children from 16 to 18 years old). Central or state governments have made no serious attempt to open any new schools at the upper secondary level over the past few decades. The only new such schools opened by the central government are Navodaya Vidyalaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya (both of which are central schools). According to a recent British Council report on Indian school education, the number of central government-run secondary schools is 42,119, and higher secondary schools are 24,808 (Falguni A Suthar *et al.* 2020) ^[5]. These schools provide education to deserving students for nominal fees.

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

Gross enrolment Ratio (GER) has increased from 21.5 in 2012-13 to 26.3 in 2018-19. The increase is more under SC Category which has increased from 16.0 in 2012-13 to 23% in 2018-19. In the case of the ST Category, the GER has increased from 11.1% in 2012-13 to 17.2% in 2018-19. (Source AISHE Report 2018-19). Accreditation: As per the data provided by the NAAC, as of June 2010, “not even 25% of the total higher education institutions in the country were accredited and among those accredited; only 30% of the universities and 45% of the colleges were found to be of quality to be ranked at 'A' level” (Basavarajappa, 2018) ^[4].

Faculties

The lack of teachers and the inability of the government educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been challenging the quality of education for

many years. Large numbers of Ph.D. / NET candidates are unemployed even if there are a lot of vacancies in higher education, and then these eligible candidates apply to other departments that represent the biggest shock to the higher education system. Lack of quality education: In the top 100 universities listed by ‘Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings’, none of the Indian universities could be found in the list. In the 2017 rankings by the HRD ministry, only 2,995 institutions (6%) participated from around 51,000- strong higher educational institutions in India. In the overall rankings, of the 100 best institutions, 67 are from just eight states. Among the best 100 universities, 40 are in three states. Among the best 100 colleges, 77 are from just five states (Nanda, 2017) ^[7].

Quality of teaching/research and lack of available resources

If we only look at the academic reputation and ratio of faculty to students, we can see where most of the universities are located in India. The academic reputation as shown in the QS classification is based on teaching and research. Teaching and research at any university depends on the quality of the faculty as well as the quality of students. The quality of teaching depends on the quality of the teachers. For teachers to transfer knowledge to students, they must have extensive knowledge of their subject matter, curricula, and educational standards, as well as enthusiasm and desire to learn throughout their careers. There are a large number of universities in India, but 20 to 30 universities with high-level teaching staff are rarely considered (Jewel Hoque, 2018) ^[6].

The quality of education depends directly on the learning process. There is less availability of learning resources in Indian colleges. Most of the colleges have poor-quality of library buildings. This leads to poor service to the library. The number of books is much smaller, there is no magazine, and there is no magazine that raises the level of new knowledge. There are also poor internet facilities for accessing online databases and resources.

Lack of facilities

As per the 2016 Annual Survey of Education Report, 3.5% of schools in India had no toilet facility while only 68.7% of schools had useable toilet facilities. 75.5% of the schools surveyed had a library in 2016, a decrease from 78.1% in 2014. The percentage of schools with separate girls’ toilets has increased from 32.9% in 2010 to 61.9% in 2016. 74.1% of schools had drinking water facilities and 64.5% of the schools had playgrounds [13]. Curriculum issues: There are many different curriculum systems that confuse students who want to achieve the same goal in engineering, medicine, and business administration. At the higher education level, there is no uniformity in the curricula taught for the same program. The curriculum is frequently reviewed without regard to the contemporary requirements of industries. There is a lack of subjects that one can take in college (Basavarajappa, 2018) ^[4].

Conclusion

The National Education Policy of 2020 is truly a path breaking document in every sense. The policy aims to tackle the pedagogical issues, and structural inequities, updating the education system to match the 21st-century modern society requirements, broadening access along with making

the students of today ready for tomorrow. The modern education system of India is ridden with struggles and crises and implementation of NEP has been quite challenging. Its effective implementation would be extremely important and critical if India wants to reap the demographic dividends and use education to boost the economy. It has been quite inspiring to see the Government show urgency and a sense of purpose by launching a series of initiatives in recent times even in the midst of a world-destroying pandemic and the novel challenges caused by it. But now it is the responsibility of the Government also to provide with and see to the fruition of these initiatives. A great number of states have already accepted the official policy with open arms and started implementing it and many are in the process of doing it. Implementation of NEP wouldn't be easily given its scale and the kind of complexity involved in the execution of the process especially gaining coordination amongst diverse stakeholders in the state, district, private sector amongst others makes the process quite cumbersome. Along with this one has to deal with the colleges in various states that do not have the finance or the infrastructure for these improvements, the weak state capacity, the non-availability of financial resources, and, most importantly, the mind-set of people toward the fulfilment of the mammoth dream of a great economy by providing quality education.

We know the importance of quality education. It directly affects all aspects of the growth of a country and helps the country to stand high in the overall platform. In India during the eras of seventy years, higher education has developed a lot in terms of quantity. However, we are still missing quality education as expected. To improve the quality of education the concerned experts have to think about the parameters (Such as enough infrastructure, updated curriculum, skilled faculties, learning resources, financial help, and well-planned guidelines) of quality education. Reduce class strengths so that teachers can give proper attendance to each and every kid.

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