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Kaleidoscopic Study of NEP 2020: From the Perspective of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

One of the core features of the National Education Policy (NEP) is its focus on research and innovation. While autonomy, good governance and new institutional structures are pathways to realize this, how the idea of innovation is conceived and enacted in a densely diverse educational system is a significant implementation challenge. In the background of research and innovation objectives of NEP, this note elicits five prominent innovation barriers prevailing in the higher education institutions (HEIs) in India and presents an innovation possibility matrix based on resources and openness. The research, development and innovation plan of NEP is evident in three ways. First is the establishment of new institutional structures. The National Research Foundation (NRF) is one such initiative to build high-quality research institutions with collaboration of Government, universities and industry. The National Education Technology Forum (NETF), another proposed institutional structure, focuses on educational technology across a range of institutions, and aims to improve pedagogy and assessment resulting in innovations in teaching and learning processes. Second is the thrust of NEP on priority and disruptive research areas such as green technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), robotics, nanotechnology, block chain and Internet of Things. Third are the pedagogical measures. Modular examinations to test core capacities, degrees by research work, streamlining higher research degrees, more incubation facilities, technology development centres, deeper industry–academic interface and interdisciplinary research are some pedagogical and general educational measures that can support the research ecosystem. It is expected that as a combined outcome of all these factors, the level of innovation and the number of intellectual property attempts will improve in our institutions. However, this enhancement will be uneven unless we are mindful of two important factors, viz. what prevents institutions from innovating and what possible spectrum of innovations exists and is available for institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Innovation barriers The successful implementation of innovation initiatives envisaged in NEP needs to recognize the current barriers to innovations in our institutions. Clarifying and plugging these gaps can ease the implementation process. From experience and the literature, we distill five innovation barriers here. Lack of space for failure and experimentation By default, education honours achievers and is therefore prone to discard failures. This is also visible in the approach of academia in confronting uncertainty. Resulting from the academic tendency to overrate failures and avoid uncertainty, HEIs provide negligible space for experimentation, which reduces the possibility for innovations. At one level, innovation is viewed as the number of attempts irrespective of the results. Larger quantity of ideas is not sufficient for innovation. Yet, every great idea, was rejected at least once before its execution and acceptance; a fact later ignored because of the widespread diffusion of the idea or innovation.

According to Paul C. Lauterbur, Nobel Prize laureate: 'you can write the entire history of science in the last 50 years in terms of papers rejected by Science or Nature' 1. Not providing enough space for rejection, experimentation and failure will block many potential innovations. What makes this barrier severe is that as institutions and individuals we are unprepared to face refutations, even if we claim that innovation is a priority. Reorienting institutional structures to accommodate innovation failures gracefully and honestly is a cultural challenge that cannot be addressed by policy enactments. Academic freedom, autonomy, internal democracy and research integrity as an integral part of the institutional DNA will naturally pave the way for freedom to experiment. Silos effect and compliance focus One of the major barriers at the last-mile policy implementation is pigeonholing the initiatives of different bodies at the institution level. Though capability building for research, innovation and incubation is a felt requirement of all institutions; unifying the initiatives at the institutional level is a leadership challenge. Robust innovation ambience in a university or college is a function of shared mindset around innovation, which can seldom be solved by regulations. As regulations are primarily seeking compliance, innovation becomes a distant possibility as long as compliance remains the target. Lack of innovation strategy If innovation is a priority for the institution, it needs a strategy that works on how to collect, prioritize and allocate resources to different and competing requirements of departments and research teams2. Through innovation strategy, the institutional governance supports sprouting of innovation possibility. In the absence of an innovation strategy, the much touted need for innovation culture remains as an aspiration value devoid of any practical implications. Entry barriers and collaboration blockers The interaction of an average Indian faculty member is mostly within the academia and much limited to the end-users of the research. Many innovations outside the mainstream academia go unacknowledged as most institutions keep high barriers of entry for grassroots innovators. The entry barriers appear in varied forms, such as disciplinary silos, recruitment compliance, regionalism and loyalty frameworks. They prohibit entry of experimenters and innovators to the system. Innovative universities worldwide explicitly recognize that the proximity of the researcher with the enduser will trigger more concrete ideas to innovate. Funding In most colleges and universities, low level of funding is one reason that makes the research more individualistic and centring it on career progression. NEP mentions that the research and innovation investment of India has only been 0.69% of the GDP, which is far less compared to many other countries such as the United States (2.8%), Israel (4.3%) and South Korea (4.2%)3. Lack of familiarity with exploring parallel funding sources from private foundations, corporate bodies, organizations abroad, crowd-sourcing and new financing models adds to the problem. Specific barriers of each institution are the variations, combinations and resultants of the above obstacles. A few national institutions may be outside of these barriers. However, in most of the universities and colleges where 80% of the students are enrolled, the barriers remain to be broken. Expanding the innovation space is one way to make inclusive participation of a variety of institutions. An innovation kaleidoscope A closer look at the innovation space in the Indian higher education system reveals two levels of educational innovations and research attempts. First is research and innovation as documented by international organizations and world-wide rankings of educational institutions based on patents, citation counts, R&D funding and research commercialization matrices. Second is the frugal innovation using bootstrapping and cost-efficient methods, most of which are unscaled and less technology-intensive. The current system of measurement of innovation tends to underrate frugal innovations. Researchers from established institutions will be at an advantage in the current system of measurement. Being a zero-sum game, dislodging or displacing top-ranked institutions becomes the priority in the ranking race. Attracting R&D funding is subject to the institutional ranking, competence of researchers and credibility of the institution, all of which together create an entry barrier for the institutions which are already at the bottom of the innovation pyramid. While we emphasize on international R&D-based innovations for all kinds of institutions in India, we are systematically overlooking the advantage of well-placed researchers in top institutions. Clearly, we miss the possible innovations in pedagogy, educational administration and many other areas which may not be directly linked with enormous resources. To view the innovation space more holistically, we present two dimensions – resources and openness. Light weight versus resource-intensive innovations Innovations that are less capital-intensive or lightweight innovations, themselves are a disruptive way of thinking about idea generation and execution4. They seek to bypass organizational silos and the fortified nature of academic infrastructure prevailing today. Light-weight innovations are not expected to replace or reduce the existing resource-intensive research, but to affect each other to be more inclusive and be

available for more number of institutions in India. Being frugal, organic and regionally relevant, innovation is an immediate possibility to accommodate the large number of students and institutional clusters in rural areas, small towns and non-metros. Open versus closed innovation Open innovation strategies that eliminate the entry barriers to innovation and seek to broaden the pool of ideas from external sources have produced considerable success in many countries4. Specific innovation goals supported by civil society will be a useful perspective5. Unlike the IP based attempts limited to few institutions, open innovation can build capacity for high-velocity, high-volume parallel innovation over long periods of time in more number of institutions. While open innovation seeks to expand the sources of new ideas, lightweight innovation attempts to disaggregate and speed up innovation, and invent and reinvent, new platforms. Over the next decade the lightweight model of innovation will force large organizations in all sectors to develop open innovation models that are more agile, lean and user-driven. Thus, combining the dimensions of resource intensity and openness we get a template for thinking – a kaleidoscope of innovation possibilities (Figure 1). Community-driven initiatives include crowd-sourced innovations, open ideations, open prototyping and open standards. Collaborative initiatives are top–down, bigbudget project innovations. Consortiums are inter-institutional alliances with highvolume resource-sharing. Innovation in cooperative structures can facilitate rapid prototyping and can have new ideas such as pop-up laboratories. Essentially they are scalable to community or collaborative or consortium-based innovations, on the basis of infusing the required openness and resources required. At the policy level, this approach helps as a lens for informed resource allocation that is balanced across different institutions and kinds of innovations. At the institution level, it helps us understand what kind of innovation direction can the institutions take, locate gaps where the capability can be built, and what sort of IP structures and protections are aimed at. The idea is not to claim that one kind of innovation is superior to another, but to get clarity on the possibility of innovations available. Towards high density of innovations The literature in the last decade suggests that the innovation process can be ignited and managed in educational settings. Innovation is about 30% nature and 70% nurture6. Still, research and innovation are sometimes seen as a random process in many institutions. Mindful of this fact, we need to be considerate on the possible types of innovations as mentioned in the kaleidoscope to increase the density of innovations. India's ability to innovate is much higher than in the past because of the technological facility to share information and insights. To advance it by NEP implementation, the kaleidoscope of innovation forces us to consider innovation capabilities that go beyond traditional R&D. It will augment the shift from a centralized, standardized, monoculture understanding of innovation to a flexible, holistic and diverse innovation domain. When we debate on the volume and value of scientific production, it is useful to include varying innovation possibilities that can be realized in different institutional contexts of higher education

DISCUSSION

The National Education Policy of India 2020 (NEP 2020), which was started by the Union Cabinet of India on 29 July 2020, outlines the vision of new education system of India.[1] The new policy replaces the previous National Policy on Education, 1986.[a] The policy is a comprehensive framework for elementary education to higher as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India. The policy aims to transform India's education system by 2030.[2]

Shortly after the release of the policy, the government clarified that no one will be forced to study any particular language and that the medium of instruction will not be shifted from English to any regional language.[3] The language policy in NEP is a broad guideline and advisory in nature; and it is up to the states, institutions, and schools to decide on the implementation.[4] Education in India is a Concurrent List subject.[5]

On the 1st August 2022, the Press Information Bureau informed that according to the "Unified District Information System for Education Plus" (UDISE+) 2020–21, over 28 languages are to be used in teaching and learning in grades (1–5). The languages are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Meitei (Manipuri), Marathi, Nepali, Maithili, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, English, Bodo, Khasi, Garo, Mizo, French, Hmar, Karbi, Santhali, Bhodi and Purgi.[6][7] New education policy is based on general formula (5+3+3+4). It is based on the student and is not dependent on government jobs for starting their own business. The major change of the student is learning one foreign language and choosing the different stream after 8th class.

The NEP 2020 replaces the National Policy on Education of 1986.[a] In January 2015, a committee under former Cabinet Secretary T. S. R. Subramanian started the consultation process for the New Education Policy. 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) chief Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan.[9] The Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) 2019, was later released by Ministry of Human Resource Development, followed by a number of public consultations.[10] The Draft NEP was 484 pages.[11] The Ministry undertook a rigorous consultation process in formulating the draft policy: "Over two lakh suggestions from 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6, 600 blocks, 6, 000 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), 676 districts were received."[12]

The National Education Policy 2020 has 'emphasised' on the use of mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction till Class 5 while, recommending its continuance till Class 8 and beyond.[15] Sanskrit and foreign languages will also be given emphasis. The Policy recommends that all students will learn three languages in their school under the 'formula'. At least two of the three languages should be native to India. It also states that no language will be imposed on the students.[16]

Shortly after the release of the policy, the government clarified that the language policy in NEP is a broad guideline; and that it was up to the states, institutions and schools to decide the implementation.[4] A more detailed language strategy would be released in the National Curriculum Framework in 2021.[4] Note was also made that there were already institutions which had implemented this language policy 60 years ago such as Sardar Patel Vidyalaya.[4] Both the Education Policy of 1986 and the Right to Education Act, 2009 promoted usage of the mother tongue too as an advisory guideline.[3]

- Focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: The policy accords the highest priority to achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by all students by Grade 3. The policy states, "The highest priority of the education system will be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025. The rest of this Policy will become relevant for our students only if this most basic learning requirement (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is first achieved. To this end, a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy will be set up by the Ministry of Education on priority. Accordingly, all State/UT governments will immediately prepare an implementation plan for attaining universal foundational literacy and numeracy in all primary schools, identifying stage-wise targets and goals to be achieved by 2025, and closely tracking and monitoring progress of the same".[17] Subsequently, the NIPUN Bharat Mission (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) was launched on 5 July 2021 to achieve this goal.[18]
- The "10 + 2" structure will be replaced with "5+3+3+4" model.[19] This will be implemented as follows:[20][21]
  - Foundational Stage: This is further subdivided into two parts: 3 years of preschool or anganwadi, followed by classes 1 and 2 in primary school. This will cover children of ages 3–8 years. The focus of studies will be in activity-based learning.
  - Preparatory Stage: Classes 3 to 5, which will cover the ages of 8–10 years. It will gradually introduce subjects like speaking, reading, writing, physical education, languages, art, science and mathematics.
  - Middle Stage: Classes 6 to 8, covering children between ages 11 and 13. It will introduce students to the more abstract concepts in subjects of mathematics, sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities.
  - Secondary Stage: Classes 9 to 12, covering the ages of 14–18 years. It is again subdivided into two parts: classes 9 and 10 covering the first phase while classes 11 and 12 covering the second phase. These 4 years of study are intended to inculcate multidisciplinary study, coupled with depth and critical thinking. Multiple options of subjects will be provided.
- Instead of exams being held every academic year, school students will only attend three exams, in classes 2, 5 and 8.[19]
- Board exams will be continued to be held for classes 10 and 12 but will be re-designed. Standards for this will be established by an assessment body, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)[19] To make them easier, these exams would be conducted twice a year, with students being offered up to two attempts.[22] The exam itself would have two parts, namely the objective and the descriptive.[1]
- This policy aims at reducing the curriculum load of students and allowing them to be more "inter-disciplinary" and "multi-lingual". One example given was "If a student wants to pursue fashion studies with physics, or if one wants to learn bakery with chemistry, they'll be allowed to do so".[23] Report cards will be "holistic", offering information about the student's skills.[1]

- Coding will be introduced from class 6 and experiential learning will be adopted[24]
- The Midday Meal Scheme will be extended to include breakfasts. More focus will be given to students' health, particularly mental health, through the deployment of counsellors and social workers.[25]

RESULTS

- It proposes a 4-year multi-disciplinary bachelor's degree in an undergraduate programme with multiple exit options. These will include professional and vocational areas and will be implemented as follows:[26]

- A certificate after completing 1 year of study
- A diploma after completing 2 years of study
- A Bachelor's degree after completion of a 3-year programme
- A 4-year multidisciplinary Bachelor's degree (the preferred option)

- MPhil (Masters of Philosophy) courses are to be discontinued to align degree education with how it is in Western models.[27]
- A Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will be set up to regulate higher education. The council's goal will be to increase gross enrollment ratio.[19] The HECI will have 4 verticals:[28]

- National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), to regulate higher education, including teacher education, while excluding medical and legal education.[29]
- National Accreditation Council (NAC), a "meta-accrediting body".[29]
- Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), for funding and financing of universities and colleges. This will replace the existing National Council for Teacher Education, All India Council for Technical Education and the University Grants Commission.[29]
- General Education Council (GEC), to frame "graduate attributes", namely the learning outcomes expected. It will also be responsible in framing a National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF).[29] The National Council for Teacher Education will come under the GEC, as a professional standard setting body (PSSB).[30]

- Other PSSBs will include professional councils such as Veterinary Council of India, Council of Architecture, Indian Council of Agricultural Research and National Council for Vocational Education and Training.[28]
- The National Testing Agency will now be given the additional responsibility of conducting entrance examinations for admissions to universities across the country, in addition to the JEE Main and NEET.[31]
- The policy proposes that higher education institutes like the IITs make changes with regard to the diversity of learning.[19]
- The policy proposes to internationalize education in India.[32] Foreign universities can now set up campuses in India.[33]
- The fees of both private and public universities will be fixed.[32]

After a failed attempt to import international branch campuses in 2012, [34] the NEP 2020 renewed the effort by explicitly allowing for foreign universities to establish campuses in India as well as giving permission for IITs to set up campuses overseas.[35] The policy sets a grand goal of utilizing international education to reestablish India as a Vishwa Guru (or world teacher), which was reiterated by India's Vice President, M. Venkaiah Naidu, who expressed a desire to establish India to attract global academic talent.[36] Scholars have raised question about the idea of importing higher education institutions from other countries in order to advance a goal of positioning the country as a world teacher.[37]

The NEP 2020 puts forward many policy changes regarding teachers and teacher education.[38] To become a teacher, a 4-year Bachelor of Education will be the minimum requirement needed by 2030.[39] The teacher recruitment process will also be strengthened and made transparent.[39] The National Council for Teacher Education will frame a National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education by 2021 and a National Professional Standards for Teachers by 2022.[39]

Under NEP 2020, EdTech companies and startups are provided with necessary guidelines and impetus to develop learning management systems, ERP softwares, assessment platforms, online labs etc. for schools and universities. National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), an autonomous body is also created to facilitate exchange of ideas on technology usage to improve learning.[40] In September 2021, in line with NEP, NITI Aayog partnered with Byju's to provide free access to its tech-driven learning programmes to engineering aspirants from 112 districts.[41]

Under NEP 2020, numerous new educational institutes, bodies and concepts have been given legislative permission to be formed. These include:[1]

- National Education Commission, headed by the Prime Minister of India[42]
- Academic Bank of Credit, a digital storage of credits earned to help resume education by utilising credits for further education[43]
- National Research Foundation, to improve research and innovation[44][45]
- Special Education Zones, to focus on the education of underrepresented group in disadvantaged regions[46]
- Gender Inclusion Fund, for assisting the nation in the education of female and transgender children[47]

The policy proposes new language institutions such as the Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation and the National Institute/ Institutes for Pali, Persian and Prakrit. Other bodies proposed include the National Mission for Mentoring, National Book Promotion Policy, National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.

Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan, chairperson of the National Education Policy (NEP) drafting panel, commented "No language is being imposed. Multi-lingual flexibility is still the basis for the new NEP 2020".[48] The UGC has asked that awareness about the policy should be spread among students and teachers.[49] Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that the policy focuses on 'how to think' rather than 'what to think'.[50]

The IIT Kanpur Director, Abhay Karandikar, supported the new policy, while the IIT Delhi director, V. Ramgopal Rao, compared the new education policy with the Morrill Land-Grant Acts of United States and called it a "Morril Moment" for India.[51] The chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), M. Jagadesh Kumar, as well as the vice-chancellor of JNU called the policy a "positive step forward" while Najma Akhtar, the vice-chancellor of Jamia Milia Islamia, called the policy "ground-breaking".[52][53] Former Delhi University vice-chancellor Dinesh Singh, said "the policy lays down the road map pretty nicely".[53] Venkaiah Naidu, the Vice President of India, welcomed the policy's flexibility and appreciated its "loftier" goal of bringing out-of-school children into the school system and reducing dropouts.[54]

Lok Sabha MP and Congress leader Shashi Tharoor welcomed the decision but stated his concerns about the implementation of the new policy.[55] A report by the Observer Research Foundation stated the same.[56]

Dhiraj Kumar Nite from Ambedkar University Delhi stated that the removal of the MPhil course was not in harmony with the principles of the NEP, since multiple exit points were offered at the undergraduate level but those interested in a Ph.D. would have no quick exit point, which the MPhil provided.[27] The JNU Student's Union (JNUSU) and Delhi University Teacher's Association criticized the government for approving the policy amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in India, stating that they had opposed the policy since its draft stage.[57] CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury alleged that suggestions made by academicians were not taken into account, while the politburo of the party condemned the commercialization encouraged by the policy.[58] Kumkum Roy of the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, stated that the subjects on the studies of Gender Studies, Media, Environment and Development, Culture, Dalit, Discrimination and Exclusion, and Media have not been mentioned for development. In the study of the Constitution, Fundamental Rights have been left out.[59] President of the DMK, M. K. Stalin, stated that the policy was passed without a discussion in the Parliament and would undermine the Tamil language, due to its "compulsory" option of Sanskrit at every level of education.[60] Aishe Ghosh of the JNUSU tweeted that internships under the policy would lead to child labour.[61][62]

The Draft NEP of 2019 was criticized for multiple reasons. A social media campaign protested over the inclusion of Hindi in schools in the south Indian states.[63][64] The Student's Federation of India stated that it threatened the federal character of the educational structure, commercialized education and undermined independent research activity.[65] Madhu Prasad of Frontline pointed out how the draft's merit-based college admissions criteria did not take into account reservations and the caste-based discrimination and oppression faced by many in the country.[66] DP Sharma appreciated the current initiative of end to end transformation of Indian education system but expressed his concerns about the implementation with care and honesty and, [67] connected the self reliant India mission with education transformation.[68]

Multiple-exit option for undergraduate programs gives institutions cover to stop tracking students dropping out due to socio-economic compulsions and instead ignore such instances as individual choice. Prioritizing instructors from private edtech companies over academic professors and online modules over classroom learning has been seen as emphasizing a

"mode-for-instruction" framework centered around vocational training and skilling for the masses; with the better "mode-for-learning" reserved for the privileged few through private universities, which are exempt from the regulations related to affirmative action.[69]

CONCLUSIONS

- In early August 2021, Karnataka became the first state to issue an order with regard to implementing NEP.[70]
- On 26th August 2021, Madhya Pradesh implemented NEP 2020.
- Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the National Education Policy-2020 will be implemented in phases by 2022.[71]
- The Telangana State government has decided to implement the newly announced National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in the State.[72]
- Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray directs to appoint experts' committee for implementation of new education policy.[73]
- Andhra Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed officials of the Education Department to implement the National Education Policy 2020 in letter and spirit across the State.[74]
- Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra said that NEP 2020 will be implemented in phased manner.[75]
- The Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma said that NEP 2020 will be implemented from 1 April 2022.[76]
- In April 2022, the UGC (University Grants Commission) approved simultaneous dual degrees, both in physical and online modes.[77]
- In October 2022, Ministry of Education released New Curriculum Framework for 3-8 years children[78] and National Credit Framework[79] inline of NEP 2020.
- In July 2022, National Digital University launched.[80]

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