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## Status of Structural Reforms in Higher Education Under NEP 2020: Implementation, Challenges and Suggestions

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### KEYWORDS

Institutional Restructuring, Regulatory System, Structural Reforms, Academic Flexibility, National Research Foundation, Higher Education Commission of India.

### ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in higher education seeks to serve global excellence in addition to nurturing local values and Bhartiya Gyan. It is concentrated on core values such as curriculum flexibility, inter-disciplinarity, equity, autonomy and innovation through research. This paper is a critical assessment of the reforms undertaken in NEP 2020, such as academic restructuring, regulatory restructuring and the faculty development and their implementation by 2025. While the policy is ambitious, its roll-out is facing challenges like bureaucratic delays, staffing, digital divide, and infrastructure. The paper identifies the key challenges and suggests solutions based on the policy documents, academic reviews and government data on institutional capacity building, financing, stakeholder engagement and effective governance. The paper concludes with evidence-based suggestions to ensure inclusive and sustainable implementation of the structural reforms of NEP 2020 to help in internationalising higher education in India.

### INTRODUCTION

India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world with over 1,100 universities and 43,000 colleges. However, the higher education sector has been affected with problems such as a conventional curriculum, lack of integration between institutions and opportunities and global competitiveness (AISHE, 2023). To address these issues in the sector, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the first national higher education reform policy of the last 34 years, and it has targeted complete reform by 2040. The policy aims to restructure the education system to establish a

multidisciplinary, equitable and research-driven education system (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). But while the idea was largely welcomed and involved a broad range of stakeholders, implementation has been uneven with only less than 40% of institutions formally undertaking restructuring in line with NEP by 2024 (UGC, 2024). This paper examines the ambition and magnitude of NEP reforms, reviews the implementation of key reforms and proposes how to address the challenges in the implementation of reforms.

### STRUCTURAL REFORMS: PROGRESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

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India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's structural reforms seek to enhance the country's higher education through multidisciplinary, institutional reform and autonomy. These reforms have been differently implemented in different states and universities. Here's an overview of the reforms and how they are being undertaken.

### **1. Reclassification of Higher Education Institutions for Multidisciplinary Education**

NEP 2020 proposes to reclassify higher education institutions (HEIs) into three types: Research-Intense Universities (RIUs), Teaching-Intense Universities (TIUs) and Autonomous Degree-granting Colleges (ADGCs) (MoE, 2020, p. 34).

The intention is for all HEIs to offer multidisciplinary education by 2040, offering courses in science, arts, humanities and vocational education. By 2025, over 750 institutions began to shift towards the integrated model (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2024), fostering innovation, diversity and flexibility in learning.

### **2. Flexible Education and Curriculum**

NEP 2020 draws from best practices worldwide (World Bank, 2021) to adopt multiple entry and exit points for undergraduate education programs. Students can leave the four-year degree course with a certificate (one year), diploma (two years) or degree (three or four years) (MoE, 2020, p. 36).

The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) backs this by digitising students' credits. ABC had more than 3.2 million students and was connected to more than 200 HEIs for mobility in 2025 (NETF, 2025).

### **3. Regulatory System**

To remove regulatory overlap, NEP 2020 recommends to set up the Higher Education

Commission of India (HECI) with four divisions:

- National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC)
- National Accreditation Council (NAC)
- Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)
- General Education Council (GEC) (MoE, 2020, p. 48)

This integrated system will replace bodies such as UGC, AICTE and NAAC and will offer better governance and oversight. The draft bill for HECI was released in 2021 and it has been rolled out in some states in 2024 (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2024).

### **4. Autonomy and Governance**

The policy promotes autonomy based on accreditation, allowing HEIs to have autonomy in designing their curriculum, appointing their teachers and determining their fee (MoE, 2020). It also encourages the phasing out of the affiliating college system by 2035.

Boards of Governors (BoG) will manage universities with better governance, the highest decision-making body and separate academic and administrative roles. It has also been piloted in some central universities (JNU and BHU) with good results (NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **5. National Research Foundation (NRF) to Support Research**

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) calls for the National Research Foundation (NRF) to enhance India's research landscape, with an investment of ₹50,000 crore (MoE, 2020, p. 45). The NRF, which was launched in 2023, has provided funding for 5,000 research projects in fields including artificial intelligence, health,

environment and education (NRF, 2024).

The scheme encourages collaboration among universities, industry and research institutes, and elevates India's research to a global standard (Sharma & Mehta, 2024).

### **6. Trainings and Capacity Building**

NEP 2020 acknowledges the role of teachers and continuing education. It proposes schemes such as the National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) and the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to promote blended learning and training (MoE, 2020, p. 53).

UGC's recent guidelines emphasise merit-based teacher appointments and assessments (UGC, 2023). Since 2021, the Faculty Induction Programs (FIPs) and ARPIT have trained more than 80,000 teachers (AICTE, 2024).

### **7. Diversity, Inclusion and Equity**

The NEP 2020 emphasises the importance of catering to the socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) by providing scholarships, inclusive infrastructure and gender equity funds (MoE, 2020, p. 58). It recommends establishing Special Education Zones (SEZs) in underdeveloped areas. Moreover, Multilingual MOOCs have begun to be developed on platforms like SWAYAM (UGC, 2024).

### **8. Technology in Higher Education**

The National Education Technology Forum (NETF) facilitates knowledge sharing and innovation in HEIs (MoE 2020). The Digital University was launched in 2023 to provide blended learning for all (MoE, 2024)

The emergence of new technologies such as AI-based tests, blockchain certificates and virtual labs

are allowing teaching and assessment approaches to be redefined (NETF, 2025).

### **9. Outcomes-Based Accreditation**

The policy anticipates a more transparent and evidence-based accreditation system via the National Accreditation Council (NAC) with a more outcomes-based approach to education (MoE, 2020, p. 49) with the help of Accreditation Dashboard, 2024 for monitoring (NAAC, 2024). HEIs are assessed on teaching, research, employability and rankings (QS Rankings, 2024).

### **10. Internationalisation of Higher Education**

NEP 2020 supports inviting the top 100 universities in the world to set up campuses in India and encourages Indian HEIs to open campuses overseas (MoE, 2020, p. 42). In 2023, UGC published guidelines for foreign HEIs to establish campuses in India (UGC, 2023).

Universities like Amrita and IIT Madras have also established overseas campuses. Moreover, there has been a notable rise in international collaborations and twin degrees since 2021 (AIU, 2024).

## **CHALLENGES IN STRUCTURAL REFORMS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to overhaul higher education in India by 2040 with significant reforms. Although the policy has a vision and broad consultations, the ground-level progress has been slow. The latest report by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Education (MoE, 2024) shows that only less than 40% of the higher education institutions (HEIs) have initiated institutional restructuring processes to align with NEP

objectives. This section highlights some of the challenges and provides some practical solutions for timely reforms.

### **(1) Institutional Reforms for Multi-disciplinarity**

**Challenges:** Transformation of existing institutions into multidisciplinary universities is still hard due to financial limitations, lack of faculty training, hesitation of affiliating universities and lack of clear directions about their implementation (AISHE, 2023).

**Suggestions:** State programs should encourage mergers and clustering. The UGC can assist in this by preparing reform strategy plans, providing funds and mentoring from established universities. Training should help prepare academic and administrative staff for this (NITI Aayog, 2023).

### **(2) Curriculum and Credit Mobility**

**Challenges:** The roll-out of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) has been delayed due to lack of digital connectivity and inter-operability. Awareness of credit mobility is also low (UGC, 2022).

**Recommendations:** Universities should have ABC units and campaigns. The National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) should integrate ABC with Learning Management Systems (LMS). An accessible ABC portal may also boost participation.

### **(3) Regulatory Reform and Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)**

**Challenges:** HECI has not been set up, because of legislative delays and resistance from other regulators. Moreover, regulatory overlap between the central and state governments makes reforms

difficult (PIB, 2024).

**Suggestions:** The HECI should be fast-tracked, with wide consultations and constitutional principles of compliance for the states. Interim co-ordination units can be used until HECI is implemented.

### **(4) Institutional Autonomy**

**Challenges:** Autonomy is limited by inadequate governance, political interference, ineffective institutional boards and administrative reluctance (due to accountability concerns) (MoE, 2020).

**Recommendations:** Set up effective and protected Boards of Governors (BoG). Autonomy should be gradual, based on performance and capacity building should be through trainings and audits.

### **(5) Enhancing Research and Innovation through the National Research Foundation (NRF)**

**Challenges:** NRF has been established, but the types of challenges faced include a poor research culture, lack of research-industry collaboration and poor research proposals (NRF, 2024).

**Suggestions:** Staff should be encouraged to attend proposal writing workshops. Funding and research-industry partnerships can be made available. Establishing NRF regional centres can be beneficial to outreach and mentoring.

### **(6) Better Faculty and Teacher Training**

**Challenges:** Lack of staff and pedagogic training, no experience with teaching online (UGC, 2023).

**Suggestions:** Employ more teachers and make digital training programs like FIP and ARPIT compulsory. Provide incentives for faculty to participate in continuing education, such as promotions and awards.

### (7) Promoting Equity and Inclusion

**Challenges:** Socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, infrastructure, financial and social inequality continue to hinder equitable access, especially in rural and disadvantaged communities (MoE, 2020).

**Suggestions:** Improve government scholarships for gender and SEDGs. Create Special Education Zones with digital enablers' supports and inclusive teachers.

### (8) Digital University

**Challenges:** Internet availability, digital literacy and content are limiting digital university (NETF, 2015).

**Suggestions:** Develop technology infrastructure in rural and small cities. Develop local language content. Provide faculty training in using technology tools such as NETF and DIKSHA.

### (9) Reforms in Accreditation

**Challenges:** Fears of low grades and manual reporting discourage institutions from taking part in accreditation (NAAC, 2024).

**Suggestions:** Mandate the use of digital dashboards. Set up regional accreditation teams. Provide incentive for participation by tying funding to performance and accreditation.

### (10) Globalisation of Indian Higher Education

**Problems:** Unclear policy and rules, poor international rankings and lack of global mobility restrict international collaborations (AIU, 2024).

**Suggestions:** Provide clarity of rules for international institutions, give guidelines. Collaborate with ranking agencies such as QS. Provide fellowships and exchanges for students

and teachers.

### Conclusion

The NEP 2020 proposes a transformative vision for higher education in India. With its focus on multidisciplinary education, greater flexibility, innovative research and governance, it has the potential to bring Indian HEIs up to international standards. But the ambitious policy faces systemic, operational and capacity building challenges. To make NEP a reality, a strong, outcome-driven, inclusive and participatory implementation approach is vital. Coordinated efforts at national and state levels, adequate funding and stakeholder engagement are essential to build an inclusive and innovative learning environment. With continued effort, these changes will transform Indian higher education into an internationally competitive system.

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