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**“NEP -2020 & Digital Higher Education Reforms “****SHEEVAN KUMAR JHA****Research Scholar****Dept. of Economics, S.K.M.U. Dumka, Jharkhand****Abstract:**

The National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 is India's revise education framework for modern learning. It replaces the earlier education policy & aims to build a system that supports innovation, flexibility & skill-focused learning. Higher education receives special attention in this policy because it shapes future careers & national growth. The goal is to make learning holistic & aligned with global demands. NEP-2020 introduces new structures, flexible programs & updated teaching models. These changes prepare students to adapt to fast evolving industries & technologies. So, the NEP-2020 aims to transform India into a global knowledge superpower by 2030, focusing on equitable, high quality & affordable education system.

The International education forums & observers, including organisation like UNESCO & academic bodies, view the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a 'transformative, ambitious & revolutionary framework 'designed to align India's higher education with global standards through comprehensive digital integration & internationalization, particularly fulfilled UN's 2030 agenda SDG4 (Sustainable Development Goals) on quality education.

This study highlights some important features & objectives that promoting education system in the new framework especially digital/technology based higher education under NEP-2020. This study shows some of the crucial initiatives by the Govt. of India that promotes & enhances NEP-2020's implementation in an effective manner. This study highlights some of the opportunities & challenges in the policy implication & constraints in the upcoming future as well.

**Keywords: NEP-2020, Higher Education, Technology, National Growth, Govt. Of India.****Introduction:**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is India's comprehensive framework to transform the education system, focusing on Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability & Accountability. Key reforms include replacing the 10+2 structure with a 5+3+3+4 design, emphasizing foundational literacy, introducing mother-tongue instruction & promoting multidisciplinary, flexible learning pathways in higher education system.

The NEP-2020 also represents a comprehensive overhaul of India's higher education system, focusing on moving from rigid, content-heavy teaching to flexible, learner-centric & multidisciplinary learning, aiming to achieve a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 2035. Digital reforms are central to this transformation, aimed at enhancing equity & accessibility through technology.


**Key Features of NEP-2020:**
**(A) School Education Structure (5+3+3+4):**
**(i) Foundational Stage (5-years) –**

In this system, ages 3-8 (Pre-School to Grade 2), focusing on play-based learning.

**(ii) Preparatory Stage (3-Years) –**

In this, ages 8-11 (Grades 3-5), focusing on activity-based learning.

**(iii) Middle Stage (3- Years) –**

In this system, ages 11-14 (Grades 6-8), introducing subject based curriculum.

**(iv) Secondary Stage (4-Years) –**

In this, ages 14-18 (Grades 9-12), allowing flexibility in subject choices.

**(B) Medium of Instruction:**

The policy mandates that, where possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5 (Preferably Grade 8) should be the home language, mother-tongue or regional language.

**(C) Assessment Reform:**

In this, a shift from rote memorization to formative 360-degree holistic progress cards assessing skill-based learning.

**(D) Higher Education Reforms Under NEP-2020:**
**1. Multidisciplinary Education & Research Universities:**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to move away from single stream colleges toward becoming multidisciplinary institutions that offer a wider array of subjects.

**2. Multiple Entry & Exit Options (MEME):**

A 4-year undergraduate programme with options to exit after 1 year (Certificate), 2 year (Diploma) or 3 years (Bachelor's Degree) with the option to re-enter later.

**3. Academic Bank of Credit (ABC):**

A digital repository enabling students to store, transfer & redeem credits earned from different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), facilitating flexibility.

**4. National Higher Education Qualification Framework:**

It standardizing learning outcomes from level 4.5 (1<sup>st</sup> year) to level 08 (doctoral).

**5. Revamped Regulatory Body:**

In this, establishment of the 'Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) as a single, 'light but tight' regulator to replace multiple bodies like UGC/AICTE, enhancing institutional autonomy.

**6. Internationalization:**

It allows top-tier foreign universities to set up campuses in India & promoting Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to set up branches abroad (i.e. IIT-Delhi-Abu Dhabi).

**(E) Digital Higher Education Reforms:**

NEP-2020 recognizes technology as a central enabler for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to bridge the urban -rural divide. It includes the following as:

**7. National Educational Technology Forum –**



An autonomous body to provide strategic direction on the use of technology for learning, assessment & administration.

**8. Digital Infrastructure (DIKSHA / SWAYAM) –**

In this, expansion of online learning platforms, virtual labs & National Digital Library of India (NDLI) to provide 24/7 access to quality content.

**9. National Digital University (NDU) –**

It envisioned to increase access to high quality education through a flexible, technology-enabled framework.

**10. Technology Enabled Accreditation –**

A shift toward outcome-oriented accreditation & AI-driven data management.

**11. Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID**

**(One Nation, One student ID) —**

A 12-digit lifelong identification number seeding academic records, integrated with Digi locker.

**Background & Definition:**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is India's first education policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, approved in July 2020 to replace the 34-year-old 1986 policy. It aims to overhaul the education system from school to higher education by focusing on foundational literacy, critical thinking, multidisciplinary learning & technology integration to foster creativity.

The policy was introduced to replace the 1986 National Policy on Education (Modified in 1992), aiming to address modern developmental imperatives. The policy was developed by a committee chaired by former ISRO chief Dr. K. Kasturirangan. The draft was based on extensive consultations held from 2015 to 2019, culminating in its approval by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020.

NEP-2020 is founded on the pillars of “**Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability & Accountability** “. It aims for an education system that is rooted in Indian culture while creating a globally aligned, equitable society.

**Historical Background Towards Multidisciplinary Education in India:**

India has a long tradition of holistic & multidisciplinary learning from universities such as Takshashila & Nalanda, to the extensive literature 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/arts, & among these 64 arts were not only subjects, such as Singing & Painting, but also Scientific fields such as Chemistry & Mathematics, Vocational fields such as Carpentry & Clothes-making, Professional fields such as Medicine & Engineering as well as Soft Skills such as Communication, Discussion & Debate.

The Very idea that all branches of creative human endeavour, including Mathematics, Science, Vocational subjects, Professional subjects & Soft-Skills should be considered ‘Arts’ has distinctly Indian origins. This notion of a knowledge of many arts (i.e. Liberal arts as modern times often called) must be brought back to Indian education, as it is exactly the kind of education that will be required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, a holistic & multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human beings i.e. intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional & moral in an integrated manner. Such an education will help develop well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21<sup>st</sup> century capacities in fields across the arts, humanities, languages, sciences, social sciences & professional, technical & vocational fields in the present as well as



upcoming future.

- **Objectives of NEP-2020 & (Digital Higher Education Reforms):**

- **To Provide Access & Equity through Digitalization,**

(i.e. establishment of National Digital University that promotes flexible, high quality & inclusive education & reducing physical infrastructure barriers especially in remote areas.

- **To Provide Quality Enhancement & Technology Integration,**

(i.e. Artificial-Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning platforms, digital exams, academic integrity for more transparent, secure & efficient evaluation & reducing administrative burdens.)

- **To Provide Skill-Based Learning & Employability,**

(i.e. Internship /Apprenticeship Portal linking Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with industry for quality placement of students.)

- **To Enhance Institutional Development & Governance,**

through Digitalizing Campus Ecosystems & establishing National Educational Technology Forum that enhances Learning, Assessment, Planning & Administration.

So, these objectives are designed to transform Indian Higher Education into a “Digital Knowledge Economy “in upcoming future.

- **Methodology of This Presentation:**

The data for this presentation is mainly based on the Secondary Sources Such as Journals, Articles, Govt. Reports & Reputable Websites, Research Paper, Newspaper, Books & Internet etc & draw a meaning conclusion.

- **Govt. of India’s Initiatives Promoting & Enhancing Higher Education Under NEP-2020:**

Higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being & in developing India. Higher education significantly contributes towards sustainable livelihoods & economic development of the nations. As India moves towards becoming a knowledge economy & society, more & more young Indians are likely to aspire for higher education.

Given the 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well rounded & creative individuals. It must enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level & also develop character, ethical & constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service & 21<sup>st</sup> century capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical & vocational subjects. A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment & enlightenment, constructive public engagement & productive contribution to the society. It must prepare students for more meaningful & satisfying lives & work roles & enable economic independence.

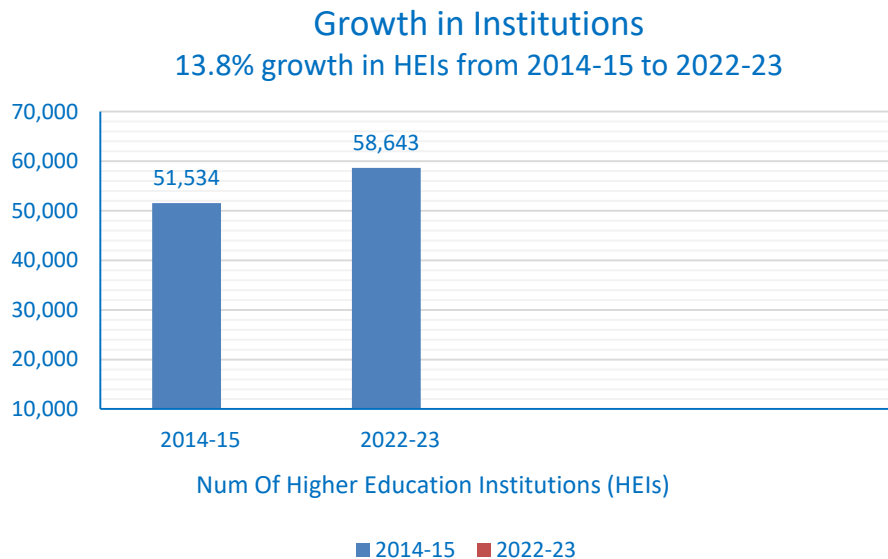
NEP-2020 aims to achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by the year 2035. To achieve this the Govt. of India is focusing on setting up more higher education institutions, provide support to disadvantaged students, making standalone institutions



multidisciplinary & promoting distance & online learning in digital platform.

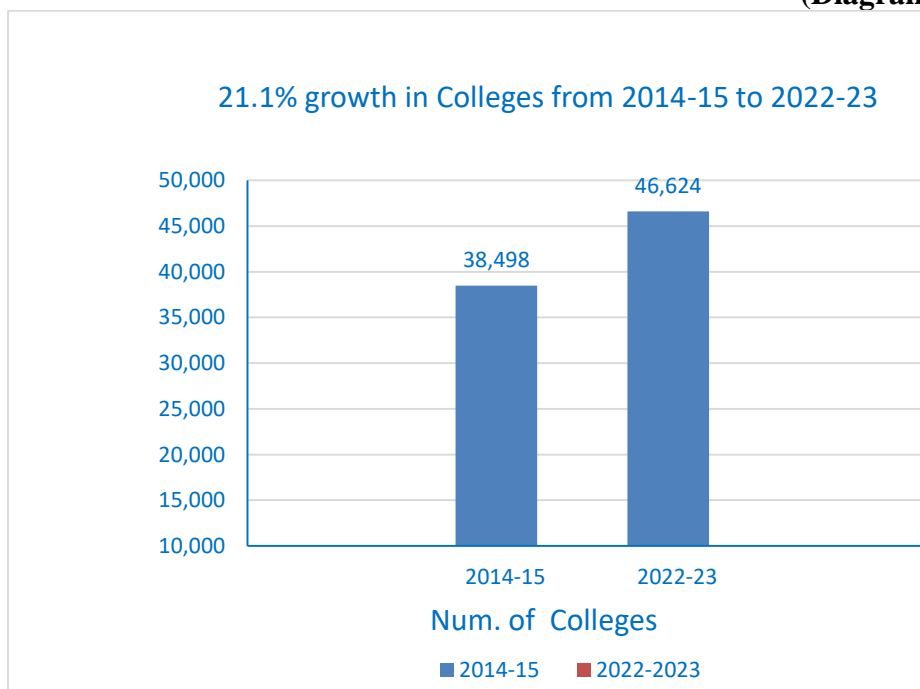
• **Graphical Presentation of Growth of Higher Educational Institutions in India: During 2014-15 to 2022-23:**

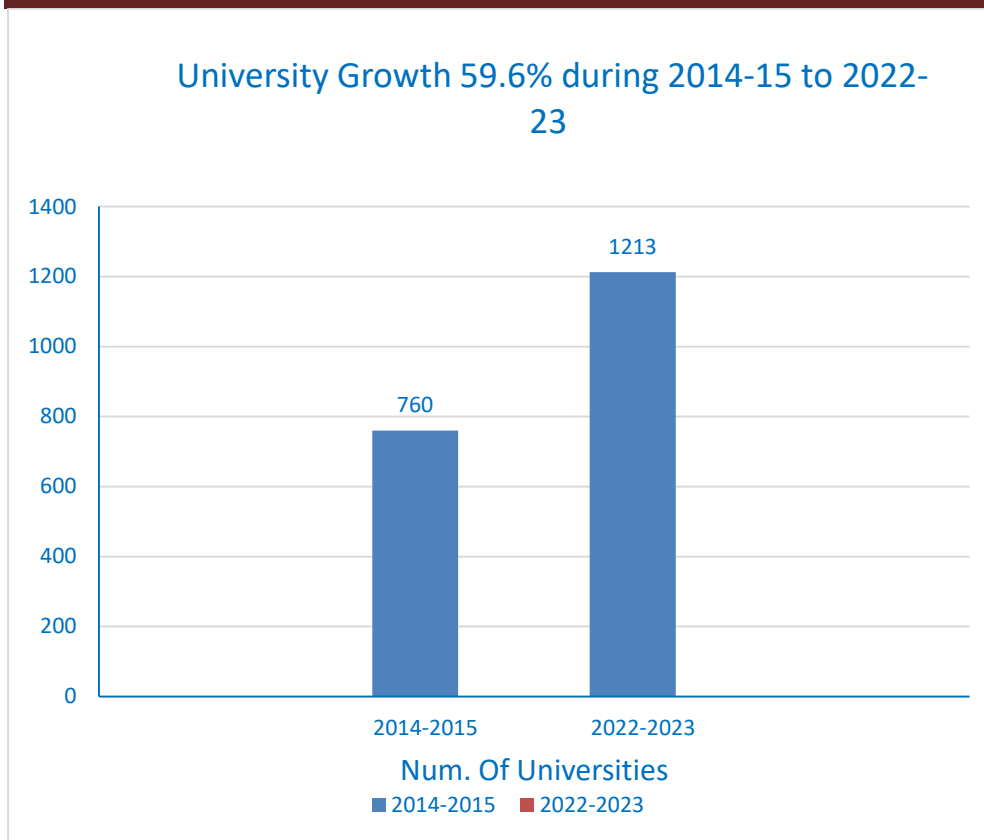
(Diagram: A)



(Source: PIB.gov.in)

(Diagram: B)





(Sources: PIB.gov.in)

(Diagram : C)

- **Govt. of India Initiatives Promoting & Enhancing Inclusivity Under NEP-2020 & Higher Education:**

**1. The PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme –**

It launched in Nov.2024, aims to enhance access to higher education through collateral free loans for students enrolled in India's top 860 institutions with a budget of Rs.3600 cr. from FY 2024-25 to 2030-31, it is set to benefit over 22 lakh students annually & support an additional 7 lakh students, with a focus on inclusivity.

**2. Vidyalakshmi Digital Rupee App –**

The PM -Vidyalakshmi Digital Rupee App is a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). It allows direct access to interest subvention benefits & is integrated with 61 Banks, developed in partnership with DFS (Dept. of Financial Services), IBA (Indian Bank Association) & member banks.

**3. Support for the Divyang-Jans –**

To ensure meaningful participation of persons with disabilities & mental illness in higher education, efforts are being made to through guidelines on inclusive pedagogical practices. These focus on adapting teaching methods & learning environments to meet diverse needs & foster equitable academic engagement. The guidelines list following key pedagogical components:

# Learning support

# Assistive Devices



# Curriculum Design

# Assessment &amp; Evaluation

# Personalized support &amp; counselling integration.

#### 4. PM-USHA (Pradhan Mantri Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan) –

It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in June 2023 by the Ministry of Education to improve the quality, equity & infrastructure of state-run higher education institutions in India. PM-USHA granted Rs.100 Cr. each to 35 selected state universities (HEIs) to strengthen autonomy, digital infra & global linkages, aligned with NEP 2020's vision for quality enhancement (By the Ministry of Education, bet. 2023-24 & 2025-26).

- **Research Questions (Questionnaire):**

#### Q.1. How NEP-2020 Affects Students Careers & Employability?

**Ans:** The NEP-2020 aims to transform Indian education from a rote learning model to a competency based flexible system. It directly impacts students' careers & employability by integrating vocational training into the main curriculum, offering multidisciplinary learning, & provide multiple entry or exit points in higher education to create a more job ready workforce.

The flexible structure allows them to build skills that match their interests. Multidisciplinary learning improves adaptability & creativity. Industry partnerships & internships will create more practical exposure. So, skill-based learning prepares students for emerging job roles. Research opportunities help them build strong analytical abilities. These changes increase overall employability & open more career pathways.

Therefore, university's & colleges should take actions to align with NEP-2020 as follows:

- Update programs to support multidisciplinary learning.
- Adopt the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) for smooth mobility.
- Design flexible Four-year degree structures & UpToDate it from other top universities from time to time.
- Strengthen digital learning systems & virtual resources.
- Provide continues faculty training in new teaching methods.
- Build Research centres & innovation hubs.
- Implement continuous assessment tools.
- Strengthen partnerships with industry & global institutions.

Thus, these steps will help institutions align with NEP-2020 & creates a modern learning environment.

#### Q.2. What are the biggest hurdles in implementing Digital Higher Education in India?

**Ans:** The biggest hurdles in implementing Digital Higher Education in India are the profound digital divide (i.e. inequitable access to devices/internet), inadequate IT infrastructure in rural institutions, shortage of digitally trained faculty & language barriers in content. These hurdles create an unequal, challenging environment for students.

A 2021 survey report (By Association of Indian Universities, AIU & Quality Assurance Strategic Planning Institutional Research, QASPIR) noted that over 50% of sampled universities lack fully equipped smart classrooms, emphasizing the infrastructure gap.

#### **Key Challenges Based on Govt. & Institutional Reports:**

##### A. **Digital Divide & Access Inequality –**

A significant disparity exists between urban & rural areas regarding high-speed internet penetration & availability of personal computing devices (i.e. laptops/smart phones) for



students. So, a massive gap exists in access to quality internet & hardware, particularly in rural & Govt. -aided institutions.

### **B. Infrastructure Deficit in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):**

According to a 2021 Survey report on online education, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not fully equipped with smart classrooms, hindering the adoption of blended learning models. Over 66% of universities require enhanced digital infrastructure. So, poor connectivity & lack of electricity in remote areas hamper the delivery of online content.

### **C. Faculty Training & Digital Pedagogy --**

Many educators in Indian higher education lack comprehensive training & proficiency in using digital tools & creating interactive online content, making it difficult to shift from traditional teaching techniques.

### **D. Language & Quality Content --**

While initiatives like SWAYAM exist, a significant portion of high-quality digital content is in English or Hindi, creating barriers for students comfortable in regional languages.

### **E. Assessment & Evaluation Challenges ---**

Ensuring academic integrity during online assessments & providing personalized feedback, especially in large scale courses remains a significant pedagogical challenge.

### **F. Socio-Economic Barriers & High Costs ---**

The cost of personal computers, laptops & data plans is prohibitive for many students, reducing access to education.

### **G. Lack of Human Interaction & Engagement ---**

Digital education often lacks the personal attention & social interaction provided by physical classrooms, which can lead to lower student motivation & isolation.

### **H. Outdated Curriculum Not Aligned with Industry Needs --**

Many universities & colleges continue to operate with syllabi that have not changed in over 30 years. Many courses are still too theoretical, placing less emphasis on skill-based education. It also diminishes the need to be engaged in solving real-world problems. So, youth are finishing programs with degrees & no practical knowledge, rendering most students' incompetent to transition into meaningful employment. The widening gap between market requirements & student exposure seems to be a prime contributor to youth unemployment.

Thus, the Government of India has launched multiple initiatives to address these issues, such as SWAYAM (online courses), SWAYAM PRABHA (DTH Channels) & the National Digital Library, aiming to create a comprehensive digital ecosystem. However, the Handbook on Digital Initiatives indicates that bridging the gap between awareness & implementation is a major focus, as many institutions are not fully utilizing these tools.

- **Challenges & Opportunities: (Under NEP-2020):**

- **Opportunities in Digital Transformation:**

### **A. Increased Access & Equity –**

Digital tools enable higher education access for students in rural areas, women & learners with disabilities, reducing the 'Digital-Divide' in educational access.

### **B. Flexible & Personalized Learning –**



The multiple 'Entry & Exit' option allows students to pause & resume their education, supported by a multidisciplinary, technology-enabled curriculum.

### C. Enhanced Quality of Education –

In this system, usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) & Virtual reality in classrooms for immersive learning experiences.

### D. Global Collaboration –

It promoting joint research projects & internationalizing higher education through digital partnerships.

- **Challenges in Implementation:**

- i). **The Digital Divide –**

A significant portion of the student population lacks reliable internet connectivity & digital devices, creating disparities in learning outcomes.

- ii). **Faculty Readiness –**

Many educators require training to transition from traditional teaching to blended or fully online pedagogical models.

- iii). **Funding & Infrastructure –**

Substantial investment is needed for institutions to upgrade their IT infrastructure, including high-speed internet & digital labs.

- iv). **Quality Assurance of online Content –**

Ensuring the high quality & relevance of online courses & evaluating the effectively.

### **Conclusion:**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, present a transformative vision for India's education system, aiming to create a more holistic, flexible & inclusive framework. It highlights modern learning systems & multidisciplinary structures. The policy aims to build strong institutions, empowered teachers & skilled learners. Its focus on equity, technology & research, prepares students for a dynamic future. So, as the institutions especially Digital Higher Educations, adopt these reforms, India on the way of creating a global standard education ecosystem that benefits not only students but also society & the nation as well.

- **Suggestions:**

- A well-structured implementation & mobility/Sustainability of NEP-2020 & transformation of effective & digital higher education system, India needs an effective Governance & leadership for higher education institutions.

- **Investment in Infrastructure Development (especially for Rural -Urban Connectivity):** A massive investment requires especially in rural internet connectivity & digital tools to address the divide.

- Focus on Teacher Training Empowerment through digital equipment for online classes, Conferences, Webinar & many more.

- Developed regional language digital content that is currently & contextually relevant.

- Requires an active parental support for effective implementation, shifting from passive involvement to partnership in a child-centred approach for both Boys & Girls.



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