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Challenges in India's Higher Education System and the Promising New National Education Policy

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Abstract:

Education plays an important role in the development of a nation. Every nation in the world is trying to modernize its domestic education system. Education is considered a prerequisite for the development of a nation. It creates a skilled workforce, and simultaneously, it also inculcates the sensibilities in individuals, which leads to citizens of high quality and character. Although it is a matter of concern that India has become the most populous country in the world, it is comforting that this vast population also has the highest proportion of youth. At present, India is known as the country with the largest youth population in the world. The real challenge now is to train and skill this vast young population. However, looking at the current national education system, doubts arise about whether this will be achieved or not. There are various flaws and limitations in the Indian education system, especially in the higher education system. The present article has adopted a comparative approach to display the current state of Indian higher education. At the same time, the new educational policy has been reviewed according to the existing problems by adopting the analytical method.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Higher Education Problems, Indian Education system, Challenges to higher education in India.

Introduction:

India is known for its democratic system, which is considered one of the best in the world. This system provides an environment conducive to protecting the rights of citizens and their overall development. This system is characterized by the participation of people on a large scale. In line with the country's overall development, public participation on a large scale is considered influential. However, having a democratic framework alone is not enough to lead a state to excellence. A successful democracy requires responsible citizens with a sense of duty and consciousness toward their country. This is where education plays a vital role. The contribution of higher education is

particularly evident here. Higher education plays a significant role in developing responsible citizens with the necessary skills and consciousness to contribute to the progress and development of the nation. In addition to imparting knowledge, higher education helps students develop a broader perspective of the world around them. This, in turn, can achieve significant growth in individual and national productivity. The percentage of youth in India's population is high. With proper education and requisite skills, this young population can make a decisive contribution to making India a developed nation. But given the country's current system of higher education and the various problems ahead, harnessing the power of youth seems difficult. The Indian higher education system currently faces issues of access and equity, funding, gender gap and overall quality of education. Along with this, higher education in India appears to be unable to match international standards. These obstacles are hindering the inclusive development of the nation. The upcoming 'New Education Policy: 2020' seems to address these issues. The analytical methodology is used in this article to examine these issues and the relevance of the new education policy in this context.

Higher Education in India:

Higher education mainly focuses on teaching, research and extension. It is considered a major tool for advancement in all walks of life. It supplies much-needed human resources for management, planning, design, teaching and research. A country's scientific and technological progress and economic growth also depend on its higher education system. Thus, education is essential for the growth of individuals and society as well. As a result, education is given a top priority in all social systems around the world. In India, the old education policy divided education into pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary and higher education levels. Higher education is the final stage in this process. It is directly associated with a person's employability and quality of life. But in India, a large portion of the country's population cannot enrol in higher education institutions due to a lack of quality primary and secondary education, limited access capacity and low income. In addition, due to the limited number of government higher education institutions, many students find it difficult to access equal education. Reluctantly, they have to admit to less expensive educational institutes. But the quality of education in such institutions seems compromised. This is a great obstacle to the education system of the country. The quality and access to education for the general public, especially the poor and the middle class, remain significant challenges.

The higher education system in India seems fragmented due to multiple regulatory bodies controlling different aspects of higher education, limited collaboration between institutions within the country, lack of consistent standards across institutions, regional disparities in accessing higher education and a significant divide between public and private institutions in India. These factors affect the higher education ecosystem by putting barriers to providing quality education to all students. Central and state governments are expected to address critical issues such as equity, quality

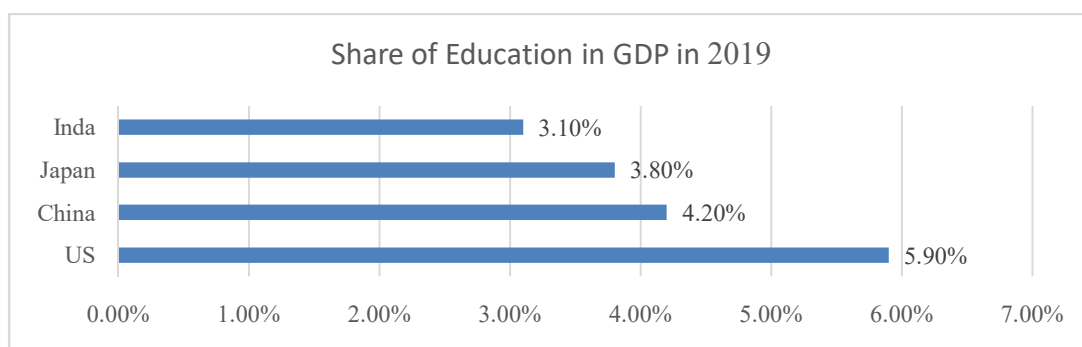
and participation in higher education. Education should be considered to be the biggest investment opportunity in this regard. In developed countries, the primary emphasis is on education and research. It is the key to the progress of developed nations. Developing and underdeveloped nations face a great deal of discouragement in the education sector. Structural constraints in these countries prevent them from increasing education spending even if they wanted to. This is strongly felt in the context of India. After independence, the educational development of the country has fallen short of expectations. In the twenty-first century, the Indian economy is seen to be flourishing. However, the huge population cannot take advantage of this economic development. This huge population has a significantly higher proportion of young people, which can be considered a remarkable feature nationally. There is a need to make proper use of this demographic dividend. By training and upskilling these youth, their increased productivity can contribute to national development. There is huge scope for growth here. However, to take advantage of it, the government should play an active and inclusive role. Currently, limited investment in the education sector and limited resources prevent a significant portion of the population from pursuing higher education.

Challenges to Higher Education in India:

India's higher education system has been facing significant challenges for years. Although the country has shown substantial economic progress, the quality of education has not kept pace with the country's development. A comparative study is done to understand the poor state of the higher education system in India. China, Japan and the United States are the three countries selected for comparison here.

India lags far behind advanced countries in terms of investment in education. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2019, India spent only 3.1% of its GDP on education, compared to 4.2% in China, 3.8% in Japan and 5.9% in the United States (See Figure 1). This lack of investment resulted in a lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of qualified teachers. As a result, many students have to go to institutions and universities that lack the necessary resources to impart quality education. Due to this, the productivity and employability of graduate students in the country are very low (See Figure 2).

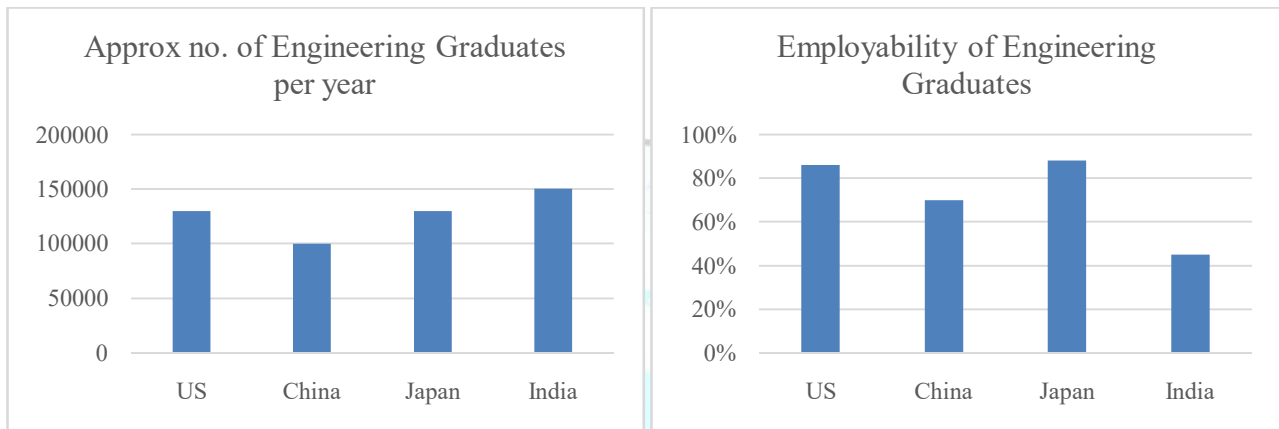
Figure 1: Investment in Education



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019)

Another major problem facing higher education in India is the high dropout rate. According to the ‘All India Survey on Higher Education’ (AISHE) report, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for higher education was 27.1% in 2019-2020, as against 26.3% in 2018-19. However, the report also revealed that the student dropout rate at the graduate education level was 35.7%, significantly higher than rates in China, Japan, and the United States. This high dropout rate is due to various reasons. These include low-quality educational institutions, inadequate infrastructure, lack of expert teachers and lack of job opportunities.

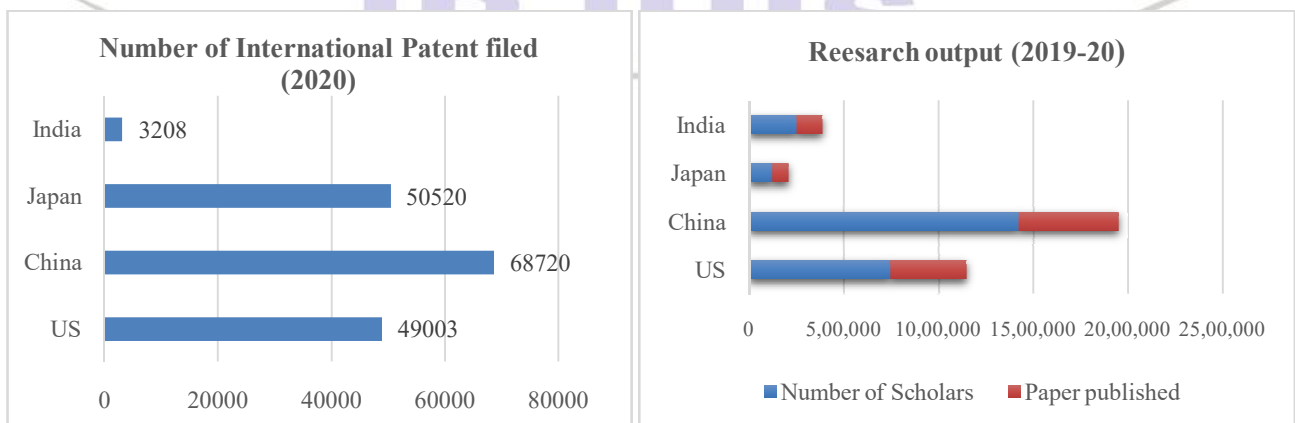
Figure 2: Productivity and Employability of Graduates



Sources: National Institutes: AICTE, MOE, JABEE & NSF. Employability data taken from various institutes: Aspiring Minds, CIER, JASSO & NACE.

India's higher education system lags globally due to its low quality of research and practicality. Their prominence is reflected in the lower number of patents and research articles filed by Indian institutions compared to China, Japan and the United States. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), China filed 68,720 international patent applications in 2020, while Japan filed 50,520, the US 49,003 and India only 3,208. The number of research papers published shows that India, the number one country in the population today, is far behind China, Japan and the United States (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Comparison of Research Output



Sources: World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), in 2020; Clarivate Analytics. (2021). Web of Science Core Collection.

Another major challenge facing India's higher education system is the lack of inclusive policies that embrace diversity. Despite India's rich diversity of cultures and languages, the higher education system remains dominated by select elite institutions. Unfortunately, students from disadvantaged groups often struggle to get admission to good educational institutions. A study by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) shows that India's top universities have a very limited number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast, China, Japan, and the United States have invested heavily in higher education. In which almost all sections of their population get great opportunities. Of course, the problem of the increased cost of education is also seen here. But these countries have overcome that and are leading the way in terms of high-quality education, excellent research and innovation. China has made significant growth in its higher education system since 2003. Japan has also invested heavily in higher education and research and has made commendable efforts to increase access to education through government scholarships for economically disadvantaged students. The United States is home to world-renowned universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, which have contributed greatly to the development of a variety of educational institutions, including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and research universities. These nations invest heavily in research and development for innovation and growth.

National Education Policy 2020:

The 'National Education Policy 2020' was introduced to address many challenges facing the Indian education system. Several proposals and changes have been adopted in the NEP 2020 aimed at addressing the issues mentioned above. Among these significant changes in higher education are as follows:

1. Increase in investment in education:

NEP 2020 proposes an increase in public investment in education to 6% of the national GDP. This will help improve infrastructure and resources in higher education institutions and also bring improvement in the quality of education. This provision is one of the best key features of NEP 2020. With increased investment higher education sector could enhance its infrastructure resulting in a conducive environment for students. If more funds were made available these institutes could attract young talents in this field. From the research work perspective, more funds will encourage more research activities. Increased funds can be utilized for establishing new knowledge and technology centres. It would also support the development of a new innovative curriculum. Overall, an increase in funds would assist infrastructural development, attract young talent and build a supportive and encouraging environment for students.

2. Promoting Research and Innovation:

NEP 2020 focuses on the importance of promoting research and innovation in higher education institutions by establishing research parks, and incubation centres and encouraging

academic-industry collaborations. Such startups and incubation centres would facilitate new ideas and the business. This move will encourage the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education. A collaboration between research institutes, including local and foreign also, and the industry sector is proposed in this policy. Besides this, there is also a proposal to establish a National Research Foundation to fund research activities in various fields. This foundation will help promote and encourage research activities in higher education. This will help to address the problem of lack of implementation in the current higher education system and speed up the research and development process and facilitate world-class research. It can greatly benefit the education, health and industry sectors of the country.

3. Promoting Diversity and Equality:

NEP 2020 highlights the importance of equity and inclusion in higher education by increasing opportunities for students from disadvantaged groups. This will be achieved through initiatives like the establishment of more institutions in remote areas, the provision of scholarships to economically poor students and greater adoption of digital technology in education delivery. One of the important changes in this new education policy is education in the local language. The policy provides for students to be educated in their local or mother tongue up to class VIII, which will surely increase the participation of students of different language backgrounds and even from the remotest areas. Apart from this, gender and socioeconomic diversity are also kept in mind in this new policy, as per the policy, girls, transgender and children with special needs education will be greatly benefited by providing educational facilities to children from economically weaker backgrounds as well as children from underprivileged groups. This will make education truly inclusive. Also, the maximum number of students can reach higher education.

4. Encourage Multidisciplinary Learning:

NEP 2020 draws attention to the benefits of multidisciplinary education by opening up the traditional locked academic framework. In this, students can choose subjects of their interest from various disciplines for the first time. Breaking this traditional closed framework barrier will truly open up all options in education for the students. Allowing students to acquire practical skills and knowledge across multiple disciplines will help address the issue of outdated and theory-only emphasis. A decision to integrate various branches has also been accepted in which the students can get access to all the disciplines of education including science, social science, arts and humanities and while doing so, they will not be bound by any discipline. This change will be very important in keeping with the holistic development of the students. This policy will also be beneficial in increasing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of the students.

5. Internationalization of Education:

The NEP 2020 proposes to increase the internationalization of higher education by

encouraging collaboration with foreign institutions and allowing foreign universities to set up campuses in India. It will help Indian educational institutions to increase their global ranking and improve the quality of education. Educational institutions in India can work with universities abroad that are considered advanced and modern. The cause of the internationalization of higher education is that not only foreign educational institutions will come to the country, but also students from abroad will come to India to study. Collaboration with international universities will be beneficial to enhance the quality of local universities as well as to achieve international standards. Along with this, an important change in this policy is online and distance education. A student in India can take admission to any educational institution around the world from home, through online means, thus bringing the latest education from around the world within the reach of local students.

6. Financial Support for Students:

The NEP 2020 consists of a provision of financial assistance to students belonging to deprived communities through various measures. Especially students from SC, ST, OBS and other Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) will be able to get this financial help in their education. The National Scholarship portal will be updated per this provision. The NEP 2020 aims at attaining inclusion and equity in higher education.

The NEP 2020 has been designed to bring changes in the governance and institutional structure of the country. The proposed framework of this higher education system seems enough capable to address all the challenges. Overall, The NEP 2020 seems inclusive and effective in meeting the requirements of new generations but the success of this policy will be determined by its effective implementation. It requires the cooperation of all stakeholders including the government, institutions and students as well. This is a step in the right direction to address the challenges of higher education in India. While it is expected that this will significantly improve the quality of education and bring opportunities for students, it must also be admitted that it will not generate new problems as it is feared that foreign institutions will give access to only the affluent class of society. The government's control over education should not diminish with the increasing penetration of foreign educational institutions. Otherwise, the poor and underprivileged students of the country should not be sidelined again.

Conclusion:

The Indian higher education system has undergone many changes since independence. Additionally, it can be seen that higher education has expanded greatly in the country. Education facilities are also available in rural areas. Although the expansion of education appears to be a positive development, it is not particularly satisfactory. The expansion of the education sector is not qualitative but quantitative. The education sector cannot be developed only by establishing universities and colleges. National interest cannot be advanced without quality standards for an

extension. How can the integrity of the education sector be improved in the present situation? The government needs immediate long-term planning as well as necessary resources and infrastructure to achieve its goals. To meet future needs, there is an urgent need to rethink financial resources, participation, quality criteria, relevance and ultimate response. Moreover, it needs to be emphasized here. To achieve and maintain national, regional or international quality, several factors are particularly important, including the careful selection of teachers and promotion of their development, especially the organization of appropriate programs for educational development and the use of world-class quality tools. The implementation of the new National Education Policy can be said to be a promising aspect. This policy has been prepared to keep in view the problems of the present situation. Its effectiveness is possible through effective and fair implementation. Also, this policy should have the ability to deal with the problems arising at the time. If this is possible, the new National Education Policy will prove to be a truly comprehensive and far-reaching impact on Indian education.

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