Reshaping Higher Education: A Comparative Study of India's National Education Policies

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Abstract:
This research paper critically analyzes the evolution of higher education policies in India through a comparative examination of the National Policy on Education NPE 1968 the National Policy on Education NPE 1986 and its 1992 revision, and the latest National Education Policy 2020 NEP 2020. It assesses the novelty of NEP 2020 explores the shortcomings of the current higher education landscape in India, and scrutinizes how the proposed reforms seek to tackle these issues. NEP 2020 represents a significant departure from its predecessors, emphasizing a multidisciplinary approach, flexibility, research orientation, and skill enhancement. This study underscores the transformative potential of NEP 2020 and emphasizes the importance of effective implementation and ongoing evaluation to achieve substantial reforms in India's higher education sector.

Keywords: NPE 1968, NPE 1986, NEP 2020, Higher Education Policies, Educational Reform, Interdisciplinary education, Indian Higher Education.

Introduction:
Education empowers a nation to have a global say by improving its economy, social equality, culture, and science and technology (Sahu & Behera, 2020). Education, especially higher education, has a positive correlation with economic growth as it provides for human capital formation and an increase in the productivity level of individuals (Hanushek, 2016). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), recognizing the significance of higher education in advancing human and societal welfare, advocates for a comprehensive overhaul of India's higher education framework. NEP 2020 represents the third national education policy in India, following the National Policy on Education, 1986 (as modified in 1992). Throughout India's history, several national education policies have been formulated, each aiming to address the evolving educational needs and challenges of the nation. However, over time, it has become evident that these policies possess gaps and limitations, calling for a thorough reassessment of the education system. Therefore, it is imperative to revisit past national education policies to comprehensively understand the current reforms in higher education proposed by the NEP 2020. This study explores the innovative aspects of the NEP 2020, particularly focusing on higher education, through a comparative analysis with the past National Education Policies, namely NPE 1968, NPE 1986, and the modified version of NPE 1986 from 1992.
The central objectives of the study are:

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the major features and goals outlined in NEP 2020, especially the higher education sector.
2. To conduct a comparative analysis between NEP 2020 and the previous three national education policies, analysing shifts in approach, policy provisions, and innovative elements introduced, particularly in the context of higher education.
3. To evaluate whether the innovative aspects of NEP 2020 in higher education are designed to address and potentially overcome the identified limitations and challenges that have persisted in higher education.

To conduct the study, a qualitative approach is chosen to comprehensively explore the historical context and policy provisions of all the national education policies of the country. The study relies on secondary sources such as research papers, articles, academic books, reliable newspaper articles and editorials, and other relevant policy documents, official publications, and scholarly works on the subject.

**Historical context: Higher Education in previous National Policies on Education:**

**NPE, 1968**

The first National Policy on Education was formulated in 1968 with the Kothari Commission’s recommendations (Sahu & Behera, 2020). The policy (MHRD, 1968) aimed at providing quality education in India focusing on scientific and technological advancement, and to promote national integration by cultivating moral and social values among learners. It adhered to several principles to assure a wholesome educational growth in the country – free education for children, academic autonomy of teachers, development of regional languages along with Hindi, equalization of educational opportunity, reforms in evaluation process, promotion of games and sports, agriculture and industry, and education of minorities etc. The policy provided for the 10+2+3 structure in education to be adopted uniformly in India. It also emphasized the need to invest 6% of national income on education for its complete growth. The NPE 1968 acknowledged the crucial role of higher education in socio-cultural progress. It recommended enhancing university education in India by improving laboratory, library, and other facilities to better serve students’ educational needs. The policy also emphasized the importance of fostering research and innovation within universities or in collaboration with them (MHRD, 1968). The National Policy on Education, 1968 did not look into the intricacies of higher education, but nevertheless laid the foundation for higher education to grow in the upcoming years.

**NPE, 1986**

The second policy was formulated in 1986 to meet the needs of the time in the field of education. It brought in numerous reforms to tackle the challenges in higher education, as the policy hinted dissatisfaction with the existing curriculum at the Universities. The central reforms proposed by the NPE 1986 (MHRD, 1986) were:

- Consolidation and expansion of higher educational institutions
- Development of autonomous colleges
- Revision of higher education programs to provide flexibility to learners in choosing the subjects of their choice.
- Initiative to undertake Teachers’ training programs
- Funding of research in Universities
- Improvement in efficiency in universities by equipping them with modern tools and resources.
- Establishing mechanisms for coordinated development, such as creating State Councils of Higher Education as statutory bodies to plan and coordinate State Higher Education. Additionally, it proposed forming a national apex body to oversee various fields like general education, agriculture, medical, technical, legal, and other professional areas to foster interdisciplinary research. The policy also recommended setting up an accreditation and assessment system to encourage self-evaluation and continuous improvement in HEIs.
- Inter-regional mobility by establishing a universal character of Universities, with inclusivity as the prime criteria.

NPE 1986 also promoted “Open and Distance Learning (ODL)” through the “Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)”, which came into being in 1985. IGNOU was tasked with coordinating and overseeing distance learning across India. The policy, in a major move, emphasized on de-linking of university degrees from employment, if the degree had not much to do with the skills required in acquiring the job. This initiative was undertaken to create and encourage job-specific courses in HEIs.

This policy is the first significant move toward consolidating higher education, complementing the groundwork established by NPE 1968.

**NPE, 1986 (as amended in 1992)**

The National Policy on Education (1986) went through a process of modification with several changes in 1992. The new modifications stressed on higher education to become more dynamic to deal with the knowledge explosion that was happening in the 1990’s (MHRD, 1992). The central focus of the policy was to consolidate and expand the facilities available in the existing institutions. The policy encouraged establishment of autonomous departments within Universities to provide for more autonomy and freedom with accountability.

Curriculum in higher education would be revised to bring in more flexibility for students in choosing the combination of subjects. State-level planning in higher education, as against the previous policy’s recommendation, would be carried out through “Councils of Higher Education” in close cooperation with the UGC. Special attention would be given on teachers’ education and training, and all educational posts would be filled solely on the basis of merit. Like its predecessors, this policy also promised to provide for enhanced support and encouragement for extensive high quality research in universities. UGC was given the responsibility to coordinate research in universities. Initiatives would be taken to set up national research facilities within universities to promote research endeavours. Likewise, research in the areas of “humanities, social sciences, and Indology” (MHRD, 1992) would receive adequate support and assistance. The policy also encouraged inter-disciplinary research for the synthesis of knowledge. These modifications looked into the
limitations of the NPE 1986 and attempted to revive the higher education of the country with appropriate structural and curriculum changes to cope with the ever changing educational needs.

**The National Education Policy, 2020**

NEP 2020 replaces its predecessor NPE 1986 to become the third national policy on education, emerging after a significant thirty-four-year gap. A committee led by former ISRO chairman K. Kasturirangan prepared the draft for the new education policy in 2019 (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). The draft prepared by the committee, after a rigorous review, was adopted by the Central government in July 2020, which came to be known as the National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP2020). It envisioned a newly revamped education system by 2040, that has a global standard with equitable access to all its citizens regardless of class, caste and gender or any other socio-economic parameters (MHRD, 2020). The general vision of the new education policy is to provide for an education curriculum that draws inspiration from the ancient Indian education system to gradually transform India into a “Global Knowledge Superpower” (MHRD, 2020). The policy not only proposes a high quality education but also aims to instil among its learners a sense of commitment towards the national duties and responsibilities, towards human rights and sustainable living, and to truly transform them into responsible global citizens. The policy document underlines twentytwo fundamental principles, that will guide the educational institutions in general, which emphasize on a student-centric, flexible, multidisciplinary, technology-enhanced, research-oriented, and teacher-faculty friendly education system for the holistic development of individuals. NEP2020 takes the positives from the previous national education policy i.e. the NPE 1986 (as modified in 1992), and proposes a radical departure with a new structure for school education and a new interdisciplinary curriculum to be adopted by the HEIs. NEP 2020 recognizes the role higher education on socio-political transformation. Quality higher education will enable students to have constructive engagement in society along with personal accomplishments and economic independence (MHRD, 2020). The key reforms proposed by NEP 2020 (MHRD, 2020) to the existing structure are:

- To increase the number of HEIs across the country with more in-take, making them multidisciplinary in nature and to provide for higher education in local/Indian languages. By the year 2030, all HEIs of the country will try to become multidisciplinary with larger enrolment ratio across the fields, and then to have this holistic development achieved by 2040.
- To pursue autonomy for faculty and institutions in higher education
- To enhance and create a student friendly environment in higher education.
- To ensure fairness and transparency in the system by appointing and advancing faculty positions through a merit based system.
- Formation of the “National Research Foundation” to foster and support research in the HEIs.
- HEIs to be governed by qualified boards with academic and administrative independence.
- In higher education, the principle of "light but tight" oversight will be implemented by a single governing body.
HEIs will increase access with greater equity and inclusion through several measures – by providing opportunities for public education, scholarships to disadvantaged students, eLearning and the ODL system, and creating a convenient educational structure for the students with disabilities.

NEP 2020’s similarity with Previous National Education Policies:

There are certain provisions in the NEP 2020 that draws inspiration from the previous policies. These could be identified as below:

Open and Distance Learning and Online education

NPE 1986 and its subsequent modification in 1992 promoted Open and Distance learning to a great extent, which helped in the success of IGNOU in the initial years and its further expansion later. The NEP 2020, acknowledging the importance open and distance learning, gives it utmost recognition by integrating it with Online and Digital education. HEIs shall be encouraged to endorse Open and Distance Learning programs to bring in more students into higher education. The Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) posed a serious threat on the traditional mode of learning i.e. classroom teaching, as the educational institutions had to shut down for a considerable period of time. This, however, opened up new possibilities for online mode of learning throughout the world. NEP 2020 recognizes the need of online learning platforms in HEIs to adapt with the changing times. The policy suggests that the HEIs shall have online programs along with Open and Distance Learning to ensure more access, improve Gross Enrolment Ratio, and to provide opportunities for lifelong learning. Universities having ODL will be supported in providing high quality online education.

Research-oriented education

NEP 2020, following the preceding national education policies of 1986 and 1992, puts stern emphasis on forming a research oriented higher education. The growth and sustenance of a nation’s economy and society is hugely impacted by the process of knowledge creation and research (MHRD, 2020). Therefore, in light of the global events like the climate crisis, population dynamics, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence, the country requires the creation of a knowledge society based on extensive research to truly achieve global leadership. The policy recommends the increase in the investment on research and innovation which currently stands at a mere 0.69% of GDP. The policy, therefore, proposed a holistic approach to increase both the quality and the quantity of research in all fields of academics. To achieve this goal, a “National Research Foundation (NRF)” shall be established. The NRF is established with the aim of creating a culture of research oriented education at the universities. The successful and relevant research will be acknowledged and taken into consideration while implementing public policies through government agencies and philanthropic institutions. The NRF will closely coordinate, without interference, the already existing research funding agencies. The foundation will be granted substantive autonomy in carrying out its responsibilities with a governing body comprising researchers and innovators from diverse fields of study.

Equity and Inclusion

NEP 2020 is an inclusive education policy, like its predecessors, which aims at achieving extensive equity, especially for the “Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)” (MHRD, 2020). The policy
acknowledges the widespread disparity in schools and colleges regarding the admission of SEDGs in India,
and proposes an inclusive approach to address the issue. It stresses the following measures for the state to
ensure a sustainable and inclusive higher education: (a) Allocate appropriate government funding for the
SEDGs. (b) Establish clear goals for increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio for SEDGs. (c) Promote gender
inclusivity (d) Expand quality HEIs in areas with significant numbers of SEDGs and in Special Education
Zones. (e) Foster the development of language inclusive institutions that promote native or Indian languages (f)
Provide financial incentives to SEDGs in higher education institutions (g) Increase awareness among the
SEDGs regarding the scope and opportunities of pursuing higher education (h) Enhancement of scientific and
technological education tools for positive outcomes in learning (MHRD, 2020).

**Teacher friendly education structure**

The first national education policy - NPE 1968 puts significant emphasis on “the academic freedom of
Teachers to pursue and publish independent studies and research” (MHRD, 1968). NPE 1986 and 1992, on a
similar tone, acknowledges the immense role educators and teachers in imparting quality education
successfully. NEP 2020, following the trend, recommends for motivated, energized, and capable faculty to
enhance the educational experience of students. All the classrooms will be structured and equipped with the
latest educational technology for a smooth functioning of the teacher-student communication. Faculty will
have the autonomy to develop their own curricular and teaching methods within the established framework.

**Vocational Education**

NPE 1968 laid the foundation for the growth of vocational education to enhance employability among
graduates. It advocated for the creation of vocational courses and institutions across the country to ensure and
increase employability of people. NEP 2020, extending this initiative, aims at overcoming the social status
hierarchy associated with vocational programs and courses by integrating it with the mainstream education
programs in all education institutions in a phased manner (MHRD, 2020).

**Innovations in NEP 2020:**

A comparative study brings into focus several key dimensions in higher education that is new to the NEP,
2020. These could be identified as below:

**Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary curriculum**

Multidisciplinary academic curriculum was initially promoted by NPE 1986 and its subsequent modification in
1992 even though it was never fully realized in reality. However, NEP 2020 elevated this concept to a newer
height- making it the focal point in the policy's reform agenda. While promoting an interdisciplinary
curriculum, the policy takes inspiration from the ancient Indian universities like Nalanda and Takshashila,
where the field of study was largely multidisciplinary with subjects ranging from singing and painting (arts),
chemistry and mathematics (Science), carpentry and cloth- making (vocational), to medicine and engineering
(professional). A multidisciplinary education will transform human beings intellectually, aesthetically, socially,
emotionally, and morally, which leads to social change in the long run. The policy emphasizes on
multidisciplinary approach as one of the ways to achieve global recognition in the 21st century. Through this
program, learners from humanities and social sciences will gain insights from science and technology, while engineering institutions like IITs will accommodate subjects from arts and humanities in a holistic manner. Higher education curriculum will become more and more flexible, as the students will be offered novel and engaging course options apart from their subjects of specialization. All HEIs shall be made capable to provide for a multidisciplinary curriculum through departments in the subjects of “languages, literature, Mathematics, philosophy, music, Indology, art, dance, theatre, Education, Economics, Statistics, Pure and Applied Sciences, Sociology, Sports, Translation and Interpretation and other such subjects as required” (MHRD, 2020). The policy aims to foster comprehensive and interdisciplinary education by proposing the creation of exemplary public universities, known as “Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)”, similar to the IITs and IIMs.”

Change in the existing academic structure
NEP 2020 recommends a flexible learner- friendly higher education structure with multiple entry and exit points at different stages replacing the traditional 10+2+3 structure. The graduation program will give students the flexibility to enter and exit at any point of the course with a diploma or a degree; although NEP 2020 suggests that the preferable option for a learner should be to opt for the four-year multidisciplinary Bachelor’s program since it will provide for a holistic experience. These changes in the undergraduate courses will also affect changes in the Master’s and Ph.D. programs. The HEIs will be made competent enough to include different designs of Master’s programs to support this multidisciplinary endeavour. A two-year Master’s program will be available, similar to the existing format, with the second year dedicated to research for students holding a three-year Bachelor’s degree. Additionally, there will be “a one-year Master’s program for students who have completed a four-year Bachelor’s degree with research” (MHRD, 2020). Consequently, pursuing a Ph.D. will necessitate either a four-year Under-Graduation degree with research or a Post-Graduation degree. The M.Phil. program has been discontinued.

“To deal with this flexible academic structure, an Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) shall be established to digitally store all the academic records of students at one place” (MHRD, 2020).

Learner-centric approach
NEP 2020 follows a student-centric approach in recommending reforms in higher education. The policy embraces a flexible curriculum, interactive teaching methods, ongoing formative assessment, and essential support for students in achieving a learner friendly education system. Learning environments for students in colleges and universities shall be supportive and engaging with updated and suitable resources and infrastructure for smooth functioning of the teaching-learning process. There will be shift in academic assessment patterns to make the system more learner-friendly. HEIs shall adopt continuous and comprehensive evaluation to help reducing the burden high-stakes examinations put on students. Universities and colleges will provide funding and adequate resources to the socio-economically disadvantaged students for their successful transition into higher education. There will be measures taken in the HEIs for the physical and psychological wellbeing of students during the course of study.
Global outreach/ Internationalization

NEP 2020 envisions an academic future in India having a significant global outreach. The policy believes that with the proposed reforms, Indian higher education, with a globally relevant curriculum in the sciences and social sciences, will attract large number of international students. The policy also provides support to those who wish to pursue higher education abroad. India will have transformed to an international study destination with premium higher education institutions providing dynamic courses at lower costs. This will achieve “internationalization at home” and restore its role as “Vishwa Guru” (MHRD, 2020). Each HEI will have an International Students Office accommodating foreign students and coordinating their affairs. There will be collaborations with foreign academic institutions with faculty/student exchange programs. Top foreign universities, particularly those ranked among the top hundred globally, will be invited to set up campuses in the country. These institutions shall receive autonomy in governance and regulations in line with other autonomous Indian universities. UGC has already released a draft proposal, keeping this proposal in mind, welcoming foreign universities to establish their campuses in the country.

Curbing Commercialization of Education

NEP 2020 marks the inaugural national education policy to advocate for reducing the commercialization of higher education. Regulatory bodies will prioritize implementing this provision immediately. NAC will take measures to regulate commercialization of higher education, although philanthropic and public-spirited initiatives of private enterprises will be encouraged to increase access in the sector.

Limitations of the existing higher education sector:

The HEIs in India often criticized for following “an outdated curriculum and pedagogy with ineffective assessment techniques and corrupt practices of recruitment” (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). A thorough literature review highlights several key challenges found in the sector, which could be identified as below:

Lack of Quality HEIs: The positive growth of higher education shapes the effectiveness of human resources in a region and ultimately determines their competitiveness in the global market (Gupta & Gupta, 2012). The extensive growth of higher education has helped enrolling an increased number of students in the past two decades, but the institutional value remains stagnant without any significant increase and material and intellectual resources (Agarwal, 2007). The institutions are rather marked by outmoded curriculum, with faculty who lack motivation in teaching and without proper competency for research, and with de-motivated students (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). The quality of several colleges in India have been seriously questioned by national accreditation councils like NAAC over the years (Nath, 2015). Higher education in India does not prepare its students adequately for vocational skills. Even though the nation has several accreditation bodies to ensure standards of higher education, they do not follow strict enforcement procedures like other international accreditation bodies (Mishra et al., 2008).

Inequity in access: There are several factors that come as a hinderance to aspiring students of higher education in India, for instance gender, caste, class, ethnicity etc. Even though the progressive affirmative action enshrined in the Indian constitution, and with government initiatives, minority and disadvantaged groups have
found a place in the educational institutions, disparity still exists in large numbers across the nation. Even after rigorous reservation initiatives for SCs, STs, and OBCs in higher education, these groups still find themselves at the receiving end of discrimination in the country, as the disadvantaged groups are structurally alienated from the system by the privileged few (Weekly & Weekly, 2016). Despite significant expansion, many underrepresented groups and regions remain largely unaffected. Higher education, today, is marked by “increasing inequalities by gender, social groups, regional status (rural and urban), and class difference” (Pradeep & Tilak, 2021). Vani K. Borooah in their paper “Measuring Inequality of access to Higher Education in India” (Borooah, 2017) presents a statistical analysis from latest data to show that socio-economic disparity, geographical location and gender contributes significantly to the inequalities present in the sector. As India hosts a majority of private institutions for higher education, getting into these institutions is highly expensive and they often structurally exclude the economically backward classes (Agarwal, 2007; J. Singh, 2011). Even in public institutions, specially professional courses largely exclude the middle and lower classes of Indians through its higher cost of admission and tuition fees (Aditisaini, 2022).

**Research and Development**: In India, academic research receives very minimal financial incentives from the government (Agarwal, 2007). The country invests less than one percent of its GDP on research and development, which is below than the global average. The country has a lower quantity of active researchers as compared to other developing and developed nations. India’s researchers per million population stands at a mere 225 as of 2017 according to the research and development statistics 2019-20. Indian HEIs also perform very poorly in research training, with most of the Ph.D. thesis in India having no significant value (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). Research output has grown significantly in science and technology in the past five years (MINISTRY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY OF INDIA, 2020), but still falls short as compared to other developed nations. In social sciences, research and development suffers from several fallacies which in making the country falling behind in global parameters in social sciences (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). Most of the research and development in India happens at specialist government sponsored research centers, away from the universities where actual research training is generally provided (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011).

**Issues of governance**: The consolidation of the sector in the past twenty years has taken place in a chaotic and unplanned way (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). The authority of UGC to promote a uniformed system of education throughout the country has met with severe resistance from state authorities over the years. The federal structure of the nation has played a key role in developing policies where state governments become protective of their regional politics and identity. The central reform policies do not reach desirably to the local institutional level. The national knowledge commission, established in 2005, has regarded Indian higher education as “over regulated and under-governed”.

**Private Universities**: Private HEIs grew significantly in the 1990s, with little to no interference from the state (Tilak, 2018), as these institutions helped in increasing the enrolment of students, making higher education more accessible. Booming of private universities in the past two decades have also come as a challenge to the Indian higher education system, as most of these institutions are profit oriented and market driven. According
to P. Agarwal (Agarwal, 2007), in the post 1980’s the proliferation of Indian higher education primarily happened through “private unaided institutions with an occupational focus”. Various entrepreneurs, business opportunists and politicians have entered into the field of establishing private institutions with profit motive to make the issue more complicated (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). The private institutions are marked by excessively high capitation fees, corrupt practices in admission and administration, and manipulation of government accreditation procedures to maintain a good reputation (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). However, private institutions provide greater enrolment to students with skilled teachers to meet the demand of the learners. But these institutions tend to ignore the bigger goal of higher education i.e. to promote holistic development of individual human being for social and economic transformation. Critics argue that the ever increasing number of affiliated colleges have come as a challenge to the existing system of higher education. The universities today accommodate huge number autonomous colleges without having proper resources and tools for their prosperity. The teachers in these colleges lose autonomy in deciding curriculum and assessment patterns, and students lack access to updated technology and resources since most of these colleges locate in remote areas (Rizvi & Gorur, 2011). Lack of national funding in higher education is another major issue, as the country spends less than 3% of its GDP in education, even though the national education policies have recommended an ideal investment of 6% GDP for the ideal growth of education. There could be noticed a faculty shortage in the HEIs, with large number of faculty posts lying vacant in several colleges and universities, including in premium institutes like IITs and IIMs (Gupta & Gupta, 2012). Apart from these, Indian higher education also lacks proper infrastructure and facilities to compete at the global stage. Educational institutions, especially the government-run institutions, lack tools and resources to deal with the large scale enrolled students (Jain, 2021) as they are heavily underfunded.

**Current implementations of NEP 2020: Challenges, Critique and Prospects**

The three national education policies NPE 1968, NPE 1986, and the NPE 1992 Program of Action—have historically aimed at minimizing or annihilating the shortcomings of the existing system with commendable intentions. Despite these efforts, the current structure remains stagnant, characterized by significant inequities in access, a shortage of quality institutions, inadequate research output, and increasing commercialization. Additionally, there is a troubling regional disparity.

NEP 2020 has successfully incorporated almost all the major fallacies of higher education in India today. The innovativeness of the policy lies in its addressing these issues with major reforms like Multidisciplinary curriculum with greater flexibility for students, promotion of research through the formation of the National Research Foundation, changing of the traditional educational structure to adapt with time, initiating online education to cope with the digital world, providing for greater faculty and institutional autonomy, more access with equity and inclusion, and internationalization of higher education to make Indian a global powerhouse in the sector of education. Nevertheless, like its predecessors, the ambitious nature of the document can only be judged by its practical implementation in the coming future.

**Immediate Response towards NEP 2020**
NEP 2020 has received mixed responses, encompassing both positive and negative feedback from academicians and stakeholders throughout the nation. R. Govinda (Govinda, 2020) has criticized the policy as an idealistic agenda with unrealistic ambitions. According to his analysis, the document aims to transport the readers into “an ideational world of words, acronyms and prosaic imagination, away from the real educational world of people and institutions along with their handicaps and capabilities”. The implementation of the policy, he further adds, is possible only when financial resources are unlimited, human resources are in abundance with efficient administration, and the nation is technologically advanced, which is a distant dream in a developing state like India. Another criticism that the policy faces is its centralization tendency, by not recognizing the diverse growth in education in different states. The country needs an adaptive national education policy that acknowledges the educational developments in states where the pan Indian prescription does not fit (Govinda, 2020). The policy is also being criticized for its emphasis on the revival of “Vedic” and “Sanskrit” based socio-economic culture, which is often characterized by caste based inequality (Varghese, 2020). Even though the policy proposes ambitious schemes to reform the education system, the political will and the adaptive capacity of the institutions will decide the fate of the document (Jain, 2021). Several reforms proposed by the policy need to be implemented keeping in mind the limitations at the ground level. For instance, while promoting online education, the government has to be aware of several limitations that widely affected virtual education during the pandemic including poor learning environment at home and marginal access to internet (A. K. Singh & Meena, 2022). Nevertheless, NEP 2020 has been recognized by several central and state universities and state governments to be implemented in the coming years. All of the top universities of the country like the Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Delhi, Banaras Hindu University, University of Hyderabad, Jamia Milia Islamia, Jadavpur University, Manipal Academy of Higher Education-Manipal, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Aligarh Muslim University, Calcutta University, Anna University, and Panjab University etc., and several IITs and IIMs across the country have started taking initiatives to make changes in their existing academic structure and curriculum in lines with NEP2020’s recommendations over the past three years. The states to initiate policies in accordance with NEP 2020 are Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Assam. One of the significant developments under NEP 2020 is the establishment of “National Digital University” which is being recognized as India’s first digital university. NDU will provide for online courses for students to acquire certificates, diploma or degree’s which shall be linked with their Academic Bank of Credit (ABC). The broader goal of NDU is to achieve equity and inclusion in higher education through easy access in a cost-effective manner. Another achievement under NEP 2020 is the UGC draft proposal inviting foreign universities to establish their campuses in India. This is a major step towards achieving “internalization at home” promised under the policy. Under the draft, foreign universities shall be provided with reasonable autonomy to carry out their curriculum, staff appointments, and administration on their own without any state interference. The success of this endeavour will be measured through the responses received from foreign universities in the coming years.
Conclusion:
In conclusion, this comparative analysis has shed light on the evolution of India's national education policies, specifically focusing on higher education. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, as modified in 1992, laid the foundation, acknowledging the significance of interdisciplinary education. Subsequent policies aimed to address the evolving needs, yet they fell short of substantial global recognition for Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), being the latest, encapsulates a paradigm shift by emphasizing a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, propelling India's higher education system into a new era. Its innovative reforms, encompassing flexibility, research-driven education, skill development, and a student-centric approach, present a promising trajectory for the future. However, NEP 2020 is currently in the process of implementation, and its full impact can only be assessed post-implementation. Recognizing the shortcomings of the current system, such as outdated curricula, inflexible structures, and insufficient emphasis on research and skill development, NEP 2020 aims to remedy these issues. It introduces measures to foster critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development among students, aligning the system with global educational standards. Despite the idealistic nature of NEP 2020, its comprehensive approach, forward-thinking goals, and emphasis on inclusivity hold immense potential to transform the higher education landscape in India. However, challenges such as adequate funding, effective implementation, faculty training, and infrastructural development need to be addressed to ensure the policy's success. The success of NEP 2020 will ultimately depend on the sustained commitment of all stakeholders, prudent policy execution, continuous evaluation, and an adaptive approach. As the policy is implemented, continuous monitoring and necessary adjustments will be crucial to fully realize its potential and to give the system its global visibility and recognition.

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