



E-ISSN: 2708-4523
P-ISSN: 2708-4515
Impact Factor (RJIF): 5.61
AJMC 2026; 7(2): 06-08
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www.allcommercejournal.com
Received: 04-11-2025
Accepted: 07-12-2025

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To Examine the Opportunities and Threats Facing India's Higher Education System in Light of the New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27084515.2026.v7.i2a.995>

Abstract

Significant changes have occurred in India's higher education system as a result of the country's socioeconomic, political, and professional shifts. Indian higher education has seen significant shifts in organization, access, and quality from its provincial foundations to post-independence advancements and more recently, in the twenty-first century. This essay examines the development of higher education in India over time, emphasizing significant turning points and the changing function of educational establishments in promoting national progress. Reforms such as the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the expanding role of technology have created opportunities, even though problems such as poor infrastructure, unequal access, and the disconnect between academic curricula and industry requirements still exist.

Potential avenues for improving the caliber and inclusivity of higher education are provided by the growing globalization of education, the emergence of private institutions, and the drive for research and innovation. This study attempts to offer insights into how India's higher education system may change to meet the demands of a more connected, competitive, and knowledge-driven world in the twenty-first century by critically analyzing both the potential and difficulties facing the sector with reference to NEP 2020.

Keywords: Globalization, Access and Equity, Quality Assurance, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Technology in Education, and Educational Reforms

Introduction

Over the past few decades, India's higher education system has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a narrow and elite system to one that is more diverse and expansive. Historically, Indian higher education was shaped by colonialism and was mostly designed to satisfy the needs of a small, affluent group of people. However, when India gained independence in 1947, the educational system changed to become more inclusive to increase access to knowledge and skill development. The system has expanded significantly over time, with more universities, colleges, and specialized institutions offering courses in a wide range of areas. India's higher-education landscape has undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This policy aims to create a holistic, inclusive, and future-ready framework, aligning with the country's ambitious target of achieving a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) by 2035. It encouraged institutions to offer a wide range of subjects, promoting flexibility and interdisciplinary learning, and allowed students to pause and resume education, recognizing prior learning and enabling flexible academic progression. It facilitates credit transfer and promotes academic mobility and lifelong learning. It emphasizes research, innovation, and technology, creating a vibrant ecosystem for academic excellence and encouraging global collaborations, student exchanges, and dual-degree programmes.

Although the NEP 2020 has made significant strides, challenges persist, including infrastructure gaps, faculty shortages, and funding constraints. The government has launched initiatives like PM-USHA, SWAYAM, and the Academic Bank of Credits to support implementation. There were many impacts on students, including greater flexibility in course selection, multiple entry and exit options, skill-based learning, global exposure, enhanced employability, and career prospects.

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Overall, the NEP 2020 aims to transform India's higher education system, making it more inclusive, innovative, and globally competitive.

In accordance with the New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this essay examines the evolution of higher education in India, focusing on its primary challenges, opportunities, and risks. This study seeks to investigate how these elements affect higher education today and what approaches might be used in the future to meet the demands of a society that is becoming more varied, competitive, and globalized. This analysis seeks to highlight potential methods through which India could enhance its higher education system and equip its youth with the necessary tools for success in the twenty-first century.

Objectives

1. To learn the progression curve of the higher education system in India from pre-independence to the current scenario.
2. To examine the essential characteristics of NEP 2020 and their possible effects on the higher education system in India.
3. To recognize the hurdles and analyze the risks confronting India's higher education system as outlined by NEP 2020.
4. To assess the potential challenges and limitations of the NEP 2020 and suggest strategies for mitigation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach that combines policy analysis, expert interviews, and an institutional case study. To track the growth of the educational system from the colonial era to the present, the historical evolution of higher education in India was first investigated through a review of secondary literature, including books, academic articles, and government reports. To assess important reforms, especially the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and their effects on the industry, policy analysis was conducted. The evolution of the higher education system from its colonial beginnings to its current state. From its colonial beginnings to the present, India's higher education system has seen several significant advancements, regulations, and reforms that have influenced its progress. The NEP 2020 document, government reports, and academic literature were analyzed, and existing studies on higher education reforms in India were reviewed. Data analysis was performed by identifying patterns in the qualitative data (e.g., challenges and opportunities).

Pre- and post-independence picture of Higher Education in India

Pre Independence (Before 1947)

Creating a class of clerks, administrators, and educated elites to meet the demands of the empire was the main goal of education during the British Empire. Only a small portion of the population had access to higher education, which was restricted and exclusive. These universities had a narrow focus and were mostly concerned with Western knowledge.

Post-Independence Era (1947-1960s)

The University Grants Commission (UGC), established in 1956 to coordinate, establish, and uphold university education standards nationwide, was the first significant step following independence. To assist the country's industrial and economic development, emphasis was placed

on developing new institutions, growing the higher education sector, and encouraging scientific research.

3. Expansion and Consolidation (After 1970s)

Through restrictions in higher education, the government concentrated on expanding women's and underprivileged classes' access to education at this time. It has major issues with quality, out-of-date curricula, and inadequate research facilities. India has sought to evaluate and enhance institutional quality since the 2000s. Another program to support the growth of higher education institutions was the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), introduced in 2013. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presented a detailed vision for India's educational future. The NEP seeks to transform the educational system with a focus on comprehensive multidisciplinary learning, greater emphasis on research and innovation, and promotion of global competitiveness.

Present State and Future Directions India's higher-education system is large and offers a wide range of programs. However, issues regarding equity, employability, and quality still exist. New prospects are being shaped by the rise of online education and the growing significance of digital learning methods. Its future is being shaped by reform initiatives such as the NEP 2020, more public-private partnerships, and an emphasis on innovation. The next stage of its development will be defined by a move toward research-oriented institutions, the use of technology in education, and initiatives to promote diversity.

Transformative Changes Proposed by the National Education Policy 2020 and Their Potential Outcomes

1. Institutions can offer a range of subjects, promoting flexibility and interdisciplinary learning. It encourages holistic education, enhances students' skills, and prepares them for a rapidly changing job market.
2. Students can pause and resume education, recognizing prior learning. It will encourage lifelong learning, lower dropout rates, and expand access.
3. It also emphasizes research, innovation, and technology, which will boost innovation, entrepreneurship, and India's global research standing.
4. Global collaborations, student exchanges, and dual-degree programs will be possible that will enhance global exposure, attract foreign students, and promote cultural exchange.

Obstacles and constraints affecting higher-education institutions

Despite its size, India's existing higher-education system confronts several major obstacles that prevent it from reaching its full potential. To achieve sustained growth and development, these issues must be addressed, as they impact the relevance, quality, and accessibility of higher education.

1. Access and Equity: Even though higher education has grown significantly in India, access is still uneven, especially for students from underprivileged origins, rural areas, and marginalized communities. A significant portion of prospective students are turned away from the higher education system because rural students frequently lack the resources, facilities, and knowledge required to pursue higher education courses. Gender differences persist, with fewer females than males choosing higher education, especially in certain fields and geographical areas.

2. Quality of Education: The quality of education in many universities and colleges is still uneven despite the sheer number of establishments in the country. Several educational schools have inadequate academic rigor, outdated curricula, and a dearth of contemporary teaching techniques. Even at prestigious universities like IITs and IIMs, a sizable segment of the higher education industry falls short of these standards. India's comparatively poor performance in international university rankings and the difficulties graduates have in finding competitive jobs are examples of this quality disparity.

3. Infrastructure Deficiencies: Many Indian universities and colleges lack essential amenities such as libraries, labs, and internet access due to limited infrastructure.

4. Faculty Shortages and Quality: The scarcity and caliber of instructors is one of the biggest issues facing higher education in India. Finding suitable faculty members is a challenge for many universities and colleges, particularly those in rural and smaller cities. The lack of Ph.D. holders in the teaching profession also impacts the general caliber of academic work.

Key impediments to the successful execution of NEP 2020

Infrastructure and Resource Constraints: Research, innovation, and infrastructure development are all hampered by a lack of funding. Overcrowded classrooms can hinder the teaching and learning processes, affecting both teachers and students. Insufficient accommodation negatively affects student well-being by causing stress and impacting their health. Inadequate faculty numbers and expertise often compromise the quality of education by limiting the depth of instruction and student support.

Equity and Access: Access to higher education is hampered by socioeconomic obstacles, ignorance, and a lack of sufficient support networks. The pursuit of a degree is often hindered by the substantial financial burden of high educational costs, which are frequently compounded by a scarcity of available scholarships and limited financial aid options. The unequal distribution of resources and opportunities among institutions (e.g., IITs vs. other colleges) has also raised questions.

Significance and Excellence: The gap between academic knowledge and real-world abilities will always exist, and there will be a delayed response to changes in the industry and worldwide trends. Many educators feel unable to adapt new curricula or effectively manage various classroom demands as a result of inadequate teacher training and professional development.

Language and Cultural Barriers: Non-English speakers have a disadvantage that limits their access and possibilities. Local language courses, teachers, and high-quality resources are very few. Education and pedagogy sometimes overlook regional cultures and conditions, making it difficult to strike a balance between diversity of languages and the challenges of national and international communication. Caste, gender, and regional biases affect students' experiences and opportunities. Language barriers exclude students from rural or non-English backgrounds, and neglect of local cultures and contexts affects student engagement and relevance. Cultural biases and language proficiency affect their career prospects.

Conclusion

The evolution of higher education in India has been a complex and multifaceted journey shaped by historical, social, political, and economic forces. Higher education has been more affected by the NEP 2020 agenda. Higher education has become more popular among students, especially those from underrepresented groups. Curriculum reforms and industry partnerships have enhanced the employability of graduates. Focusing on research drives innovation and entrepreneurship. Internationalization has started attracting foreign students and promoting India's soft power. Institutes need to allocate sufficient funds for infrastructure, technology, and faculty training. They should encourage public-private partnerships for resource sharing and provide affordable devices and Internet access to disadvantaged students. Universities should promote industry-academia collaborations for hands-on training and research, and additionally develop regional language resources and courses. They should continuously encourage stakeholder feedback and participation in the implementation of policies. Higher education in India faces both opportunities and challenges in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, there are opportunities for innovation in curriculum design, delivery strategies, and institutional cooperation due to the rapid development of technology, globalization, and an increasing need for skilled workers. However, to build a truly dynamic and forward-thinking educational system, fundamental problems such as faculty shortages, regional imbalances, and antiquated infrastructure must be addressed. India can use the potential of its higher education system to not only compete on the international scene but also promote socioeconomic development and social mobility for all by emphasizing inclusivity, coordinating education with industrial demands, and encouraging research and innovation (R&I). In conclusion, the future of higher education in India depends on a well-rounded approach that addresses both immediate challenges and long-term opportunities. The NEP's 2020 provide a strong foundation, but perseverance, thoughtful policies, and a dedication to academic success are necessary for meaningful improvement. India has the potential to develop into a global center for higher education that can produce the skills and abilities required to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century if these initiatives are implemented properly.

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