



DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

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Topic: GS2 - Higher Education



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It's time to act, not do more research

Context:-

- Recently government has begun yet another *rethink of higher education policies* through the **draft NEP (National Education Policy)** and **EQUIP (Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Programme)**.
- While it is always valuable for various government committees to point to the importance of higher education for economy and society, it is not necessary to convene many experts through initiatives such as EQUIP to tell the government and the academic community what they already know as there has been *an endless series of official reports and programmes aimed at improving higher education in independent India have all basically said the same thing but not implemented in substance*.
- Perhaps the time, energy and resources that EQUIP will require can be better spent *implementing the obvious* (like adequate funding, quality of teacher, improving gross enrollment ratio etc).

Basic Issues facing by Indian Higher Education:-

- **Inadequate Allocation of Funds:** Central to both quality improvement and increased access is money. Higher education in India has been **chronically underfunded**
 - it spends less than most other **BRICS countries** on higher education.

- *Inadequate funding is evident at all levels.* All State governments, which provide the bulk of higher education money, also fail to adequately support students and institutions.
 - Even the **Institutions of Eminence scheme** falls short of requirements and is dramatically behind similar programmes in China and several European countries.
 - Funding for basic research, which is largely a Central government responsibility, lags behind peer countries.
 - Apart from Tata Trusts, Infosys Foundation, and Pratiksha Trust, *industry provides little support.*
 - Thus, India requires substantial additional resources for higher education to improve quality and build a small but important “world class” sector.
 - Massive effort is needed at both State and Central levels — and the private sector must contribute as well.
- **Expanding the Enrolment in Post-Secondary Education:** **Draft NEP** aims at increasing the gross enrolment ratio to **at least 50% by 2035**, *EQUIP targets doubling the gross enrolment ratio to 52% by 2024.*
- While at present, India’s gross enrolment ratio is **25.8%**, significantly behind **China’s 51%** or much of **Europe and North America, where 80%** or more young people enrol in higher education.
 - India’s challenge is even greater because half of the population is under 25 years of age. The

- challenge is not only to enrol students, but to ensure that they can graduate. Non-completion is a serious problem in the sector.
- **Quality of Higher Education:** The challenge is not only to enrol students and improve graduation rates but also to ensure that they are provided with **a reasonable standard of quality**.
 - It is universally recognised that much of Indian higher education is of relatively poor quality.
 - Employers often complain that they cannot hire graduates without additional training.
 - The fact that many engineering colleges even today have to offer “**finishing programmes**” to their graduates underlines the pathetic state of quality imparted by these institutions.
- **Commercialisation of Education does not inline with Quality Education:** The private sector is a key part of the equation. India has the largest number of students in private higher education in the world. But much of private higher education is of ***poor quality and commercially oriented***.
 - **Robust quality assurance** is needed for all of post-secondary education, but especially for private institutions.
- **Need of Differentiated Academic System:** Institutions with different missions ***to serve a range of individual and societal needs***. Some “world class” research-intensive universities are needed.
 - Colleges and universities that **focus on quality teaching** and serve large numbers of students are crucial.
 - Distance education enters the mix as well.

- **Governance Issues in Higher Education:** The structure and governance of the higher education system needs major reform.
 - There is too much bureaucracy at all levels, and in some places, political and other pressures are immense.
 - Professors have little authority and the hand of government and managements is too heavy. At the same time, accountability for performance is generally lacking.

Suggestions:-

- Dramatically increased funding from diverse sources, and the NEP's recommendation for a **new National Research Foundation** is a welcome step in this direction;
- Significantly **increased access** to post-secondary education, but **with careful attention to both quality and affordability**, and with better rates of degree completion;
- **Longitudinal studies on student outcomes;**
- To develop **“world class” research-intensive universities**, so that it can compete for the best brains, produce top research, and be fully engaged in the **global knowledge economy;**
- To ensure that the private higher education sector works for the **public good;**
- To develop a differentiated and integrated higher education system, with institutions serving manifold **societal and academic needs;**

- Reforms in the governance of college and universities **to permit autonomy and innovation** at the institutional level; and
- Better coordination between the University Grants Commission and ministries and departments involved in higher education, skill development, and research.

Way Forward:-

- The latest draft NEP and EQUIP have reiterated the importance of some of these points. There is really no need to spend money and attention on a new review.
- The needs are clear and have been articulated by earlier commissions and committees.
- The solutions are largely obvious as well. What is needed is not more research, but rather long-neglected action.