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*Review Article*

# NEP 2020 and ICT Readiness with Special Reference to Higher Education

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***ABSTRACT: NEP 2020 is the seventh education policy in independent India but it is unique in many aspects but the most important feature of the same is the incorporation of ICT as an essential ingredient of the same. The visions and objectives set in the policy document are having tall goals to be achieved including achieving target GER at different stages to make India 'Knowledge Hub'. Without contribution from ICT targets seems to be not achievable. Particularly, the proliferation of higher education to the remotest corner of India with world class teaching environments is possible only with intensive use of ICT. It appears that in 21st century higher education has been much dependent on ICT-tools and ICT-plate forms. The paper aims at examining how far our higher education ecosystem is equipped to harvest the benefit of NEP 2020.***

***KEYWORDS: NEP 2020, GER, ICT, ICT-tools, ICT-platforms.***

## INTRODUCTION

Education, though is not a fundamental necessity of life, but a meaning life surely requires education. Education not only enhances the horizon of knowledge and information but it widens the mind of individuals and communities to adopt a worldview. Rationality is one of the most explicit expressions of the outcome of education. Education is not also expected to promote compassion, peace and harmony among the people, it's also expected to remove superstition, ignorance and arrogance in individual. The education atmosphere that we see today is not essentially what has been shaped during independent India systematically. It has all the ingredients of the hangover of the ancient Indian education system from the Medieval-Mughal era to the colonial period for about 200 years.

In independent India several rounds of education policy have been framed, some of them for the entire education system and a few of them to shape a particular sector of education. The formation of the University Education Commission (1948) is the beginning of concerted efforts of the Govt of India to shape modern education in India. It's followed by the Secondary Education Commission (1952), Indian Education Commission (1964-66), National Educational Policy of 1968, Draft National Policy on Education (1979), National Policy on Education (1986) to traverse a long way and then we finally reached the National Education Policy 2020. India's much waited aspiration of becoming global leadership (Viswaguru) in terms of economic growth and knowledge power with largest number of youths in the world, universal high-quality education is essential to way forward for developing and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual, the society and the

country in particular and the world in general. The necessity of NEP 2020 is to be examined in the above stated light.

*Fundamental guiding principles of NEP 2020*

The NEP 2020 is designed based on a certain principle enlisted below:

1. Recognizing, appreciating, and fostering each student's individual potential in order to assist their overall development.
2. The main objective is to have all pupils master fundamental reading and numeracy skills by the third grade.
3. Giving students the freedom to choose courses that suit their skills and interests, therefore selecting their life trajectories.
4. Doing away with severe compartmentalization and eliminating rigid differences between academic streams.
5. Encouraging the use of several disciplines in education in order to create a coherent body of knowledge.
6. Giving conceptual understanding the top priority above rote knowledge for tests.
7. Promoting innovation via critical and creative thought and rational decision-making.
8. Developing constitutional, human, and ethical ideals among students.
9. Fostering multilingualism in line with the variety of the nation.
10. Giving pupils life skills like resilience, cooperation, collaboration, and communication.
11. Giving frequent formative evaluations a high priority in order to promote learning and deter an overly supportive culture.
12. Making broad and efficient use of technology in instruction.
13. Promoting tolerance for variety and respect for regional settings.
14. Ensuring high levels of inclusion and equality across the board in the educational system.
15. Establishing an integrated curricular framework that spans early childhood care and education, as well as secondary and tertiary education.
16. Addressing faculty recruitment, continued professional development, and creating welcoming work cultures and circumstances while acknowledging that faculty members are essential to the educational process.
17. Creating a simple but effective regulatory framework to support autonomy, good governance, and empowerment while preserving the educational system's integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency.
18. Recognizing the importance of excellent research in building a culture of research and providing superior education and development.
19. Monitoring ongoing development via ongoing study and routine review by educational professionals.

*Structure and Composition*

The composition of the entire NEP 2020 may be understood through analysis of the components. It has four components namely (i) School education, (ii) Higher education, (iii) other key issues and (iv) Making it happen (how to implement).

Part I: School Education

This NEP 2020 envisages that the existing 10+2 structure in school education will be modified with a new system keeping the pedagogical and curricular restructuring needed to introduce 5+3+3+4 covering ages 3-18 as shown in the representative figure-1. As per the existing policy children in the age group of 3-6 are not part of the 10+2 structure as Class 1 begins at age of 6 years. In the proposed new system of 5+3+3+4 structure, in order to promote better overall learning, development, and well-being, a strong base of "Early Childhood Care and Education" (ECCE) from age 3 is also included.

Restructuring school curriculum and pedagogy in a new 5+3+3+4 design is envisaged. The curricular and pedagogical structure of school education will be done to fit the different stages of their development, corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years, respectively. The pedagogical structure and the curricular framework for school education will be guided a design of 5+3+3+4, consisting of the Foundational Stage in two parts; that is, 3-yearsAnganwadi/pre-school + 2-years primary school in the Grades 1-2; both together covering the ages 3-8 year; the Preparatory Stage comprising Grades 3-5, covering ages 8-11; Middle Stage comprising the Grades 6-8, covering the ages 11-14 year, and the Secondary Stage comprising the Grades 9-12 in two phases, i.e., 9 and 10 in the first phase and 11 and 12 in the second phase, covering the ages 14-18 years .

Part II: Higher Education

Higher education system in India currently facing some of the major problems and hence the NEP 2020 strides to find out solutions for them that include:

a) Higher educational ecosystem is presently severely fragmented;

b) The little importance placed on the improvement of cognitive abilities and learning results.

c) The division of academic disciplines into distinct categories and the grouping of students into specific areas of study.

d) Access restrictions in areas with low socioeconomic status.

e) Very little institutional and teacher autonomy.

f) The lack of procedures for professors and institutional leaders to develop their careers based on merit.

g) The majority of colleges and universities do very little research.

h) Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs') governance and leadership that isn't performing at its best.

i) A regulatory framework that is woefully ineffective.

j) There are several affiliated institutions that produce students of poor caliber.

Part III: Other Key Areas of Focus

The NEP 2020 put emphasis of the followings beyond school education and higher education:

a) Professional growth via education.

b) Adult education and ongoing learning throughout one's life.

c) Fighting for the growth and development of Indian arts, languages, and cultural traditions.

d) Using and incorporating technology.

e) Digital and online education: guaranteeing equitable and broad access to technology.

Part IV: Making it Happen

The policy document (NEP 2020) also talks about the ways to implement the provisions and proposals of the NEP 2020

a) Strengthening the central advisory board of education,

b) Financing affordable and quality education for all,

c) Implementation pathways and financial provisions.

*Need and Significance*

There is no denying that ICT has been used in a variety of ways to improve educational quality. It makes it possible for teachers to quickly obtain improved lesson plans and instructional materials, often augmented with multimedia components and the most productive teaching techniques. Alongside interactive teacher training, these systems provide data analysis of instructors' strengths and shortcomings to pinpoint areas for growth. The difficulties that students and classrooms both confront may be identified using this data. Additionally, the ICT features included into these platforms provide instructors, students, and parents with a more collaborative classroom experience.

As a result, the most wide and complete societal platform in use as of right now is the MHRD's DIKSHA platform, powered by EkStep. A multilingual package currently being implemented in several states by DIKSHA includes high-quality user-generated content, student assessment tools, data collection and analysis instruments, teacher professional development resources, and a way for parent-teacher-student communication in order to fully integrate ICT into all facets of education. Additionally, several states make use of all-purpose platforms including Gujarat's Learning Delight, Karnataka's Megh Shala, and the Central Board for Secondary Education's Saransh. There are other platforms that are specifically designed to satisfy certain needs, like Story Weaver, a novel project aiming at producing literacy materials in local languages. Thanks to their strong integration capabilities, EkStep and DIKSHA have the functional ability to incorporate other platforms as specialized modules integrated within their own systems, with the potential to bring different platforms together under one roof without compromising local compliance and adaptability.

Among many advantages of ICT application, the first one is ICT reduces the financial expenditures related to procuring and delivering information and materials. The market for ICT components has the potential to grow significantly, benefitting both content creators and consumers of all types with access costing almost nothing. ICT-enabled markets thus experience increased market volatility and less susceptibility to monopolistic domination. Price reductions are the outcome, giving consumers and service providers extra benefits via privileged access to specialist services in marketplaces where they may not otherwise be available. ICTs also greatly reduce the amount of time needed, particularly for finding and using high-quality information and services. When compared to earlier information sharing techniques like in-person visits, printed directories, physical adverts, or word-of-mouth recommendations, communication technology, especially on the internet platform, has

significantly increased the efficiency of search procedures. Auto processing facility through Artificial Intelligence (AI) can deliver required information even more rapidly and rather efficiently.

One can assert with high level of confidence that in the 21st century ICT platforms have capability to develop the volume as well as quality of communication between learners, teachers, parents, as well as the rest of the stakeholders in the educational ecosystem.

Need of Educational Reforms:

i) Subsequently education is a lifelong process, universal access to it at all times and in all places is essential.

ii) The significance of gaining access to this large knowledge repository is further highlighted by the ongoing multiplication of information.

iii) IT is essential for ensuring that education is accessible to a wide variety of students, which is a prerequisite.

iv) As a condition for participation in society, people must be digitally literate.

v) We must increase educational access and lower costs, and IT can help with both of these goals. Illiteracy and poverty are significant difficulties that must be addressed.

Importance of ICT Platforms:

i) Access to variety of learning resources
ii) Immediacy to information
iii) Anytime learning
iv) Anywhere learning
v) Collaborative learning
vi) Multimedia approach to education
vii) Authentic and up to date information
viii) Access to online libraries
ix) Teaching of different subjects made interesting
x) educational data storage
xi) Distance education
xii) Access to the source of information
xiii) Multiple communication channels (e-mail, chat, forum, blogs etc.)
xiv) Access to open courseware
xv) Better accesses to children with disabilities
xvi) Reduces time on many routine tasks

There are a number of areas of the education sector where ICT has been applied. Some of the projects are taken up by Governments at national level DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure For Knowledge Sharing) and Saransh (CBSE); and some others are taken up at state level such Meghshala (Karnataka), Learning Delight (Gujarat) etc. EkStep (Infosys). On the other hand, as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) ICT giants also initiated some projects such as HCL's Samuday project (Gurukul, Vidyagyan and My School), Infosys's Akshara Foundation, and Wipro (Azim Premzi Foundation) also took several philanthropic initiatives to 'in the areas of assessment, curriculum reform, textbook development, teacher training and education administration'. The EDUSAT launched by ISRO (2004) gave a real boost to enhance ICT application in the education sector. Apart from these CLIX (Connected Learning Initiatives), SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds), A-VIEW (Amrita Virtual Interactive E-Learning World), JUGNU (Let's make everyone shine), MINDSPARK are some of the NGO and collaborative attempts to enabled education section

through ICT. Some of the specialised platforms were built to spread application of ICT in the education sector namely, FIRKI, E-PATHSHALA, SHAALA SIDDHI, STORYWEAVER, CHALKLIT, KLP (Karnataka Learning Partnership), EVIDYALOKA etc. Along with these platforms a few international platforms were also created such as Khan Academy, COURSERA and EDX that proved to be of great help. During the pandemic period and even later on several such platforms have been built up taking the advantages of shut down of educational institutions temporarily have proved to be immensely successful in integrating education sector with ICT application. Other comprehensive platforms such as RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan), CAL (Computer-Assisted Learning), SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan) at national level and RISE ("Rajasthan Interface for School Educators"). MAA ("Maharashtra Academic Authority") as well as MITRA (Maharashtra in Service Teachers Resources) are some of the mentioned ICT initiatives in the education sector.

*ICT Requirements in Higher Education*

It's an undeniable fact that ICT in higher education has become nearly inevitable. Starting from enrolment to imparting education, conducting examination, evaluation of students' performance and keeping the student's progression reports etc will be much easier with application of ICT. Numerous advantages will result from the creation of institution complexes or clusters and the cooperative sharing of resources among these complexes. These benefits include improved support for students with disabilities, an increase in the number of topic-specific clubs and academic, sporting, artistic, and craft-related events held throughout the institution complexes, improved integration of the arts, music, languages, vocational subjects, and physical education in classrooms thanks to the combined efforts of these subjects' teachers, as well as the use of ICT tools for holding virtual classes. The partnership of social workers and counsellors will also lead to improved student assistance, greater enrolment, attendance, and academic success. Institution Complex Management Committees, as opposed to individual Institution Management Committees, will also improve governance, supervision, and monitoring while promoting local stakeholders' ideas and initiatives. In a cost-effective way, the educational system will be revitalized and empowered by the creation of broader communities made up of institutions, institution leaders, instructors, students, support staff, parents and local people.

NEP 2020 policy makes suitable provisions for infrastructure so that there is universal access to adult education as well as lifelong learning. Within this framework, attempts will be made to use schools and school complexes for adult education classes that will have ICT resources outside of typical business hours, including weekends, as well as public libraries. To the greatest extent possible, both physical and human resources must be used for school, higher education, adult education, technical and vocational training, as well as other community and volunteer endeavours. "Adult Education Centres" (AECs) may thus be included into other public institutions, such as "Higher Education Institutions" (HEIs) and vocational training facilities.

NEP 2020 is designed to take advantage of modern technology, particularly ICT. As per the provisions made in the NEP 2022, technology-based alternative options for adult learning such as apps, online courses / modules, satellite-based TV channels, online books, and ICT-equipped libraries and Adult Education Centres, etc. will be developed in years to come, primarily through government and also through philanthropic initiatives. An initiative of crowd sourcing and competitions will also be initiated to develop funds for the purpose. Application of ICT to begin quality adult education through an online or blended mode will be encouraged.

Innovative solutions are necessary given the rapidly changing globe and society, as well as the shifting conditions and reality. The worldwide effect of pandemics and epidemics emphasizes the need for alternate high-quality education delivery methods, particularly when conventional in-person approaches are impractical. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes the value of using technology, in particular ICT, while also being cognizant of the dangers and hazards involved as well as any possible benefits. In order to assess how the benefits of online/digital education might be maximized while minimizing possible downsides, well-planned and scaled pilot studies are required. To address the current and upcoming difficulties in providing high-quality education to everyone, it is necessary to extend already-existing online and digital platforms and continuing ICT-based educational efforts.

In the emerging ecosystem of digital technologies as well as the growing importance of leveraging technology for teaching and learning at every level from KG to PG i.e. from school to higher education, the NEP 2020 recommends the following key initiatives:

a) Pilot Studies for Online Education: Appropriate groups from NETF, CIET, NIOS, IGNOU, IITs, NITs, and other organizations may be chosen to carry out a number of concurrent pilot studies to determine the benefits of combining conventional education with online learning. According to NEP 2020, the results of these pilot projects will be made public and used to make continuing improvements.

b) Digital Infrastructure: As of now, the education industry needs investments to build an open, interoperable, adaptive, and publicly available digital infrastructure. This architecture should be built to support numerous point solutions and many platforms.

c) Online teaching platform and tools: Appropriate existing e-learning platforms such as SWAYAM and DIKSHA slated to be extended to provide teachers with a structured, user-friendly, rich set of assistive tools for monitoring progress of learners.

d) Content creation, digital repository, and dissemination: A digital repository of content comprising creation of Coursework, Learning Games & Simulations, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality are planned to be developed, with a clear public monitoring system for ratings by the users on effectiveness and quality.

e) Addressing the digital divide: It is a fact that there still exists a substantial section of the population whose digital access is limited, therefore, it's provisioned in the NEP 2020 that the existing mass media, particularly electronic media such as television, radio, and community radio will be extensively used for telecast and broadcasts.

f) Virtual Labs: Existing e-learning platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and SWAYAMPRABHA will also be equipped with creation of virtual labs so that all learners have equal access to quality practical and hands-on experiment-based learning opportunities.

g) Training and incentives for teachers: Teachers are urged to take part in extensive training cantered on student-centric teaching techniques. They will develop into skilled designers of top-quality online educational material as a consequence, making use of online learning tools and platforms.

h) Online assessment and examinations: Appropriate and equipped bodies, such as the proposed National Assessment Centre or PARAKH, School Boards, NTA, and other important bodies will design and implement assessment frameworks comprising design of competencies, portfolio, rubrics, standardized assessments, and assessment analytics.

i) Blended models of learning: While encouraging digital education and learning will take precedence, the value of in-person, face-to-face learning is clearly acknowledged.

j) Laying down standards: NETF and similar organizations will set standards for content, technology, and pedagogy in the area of online/digital teaching and learning since research on online/digital education is essential. These standards will be helpful in creating the e-learning policies that will be used by a variety of organizations, such as states, boards, schools, school districts, HEIs and others.

*Readiness of ICT in Higher Education*

It is needless to say that the preparedness to fully take advantage of ICT in the education sector is still inadequate. Undoubtedly, ICT integration is necessary in education at all levels, but especially in higher education, in order to reduce administrative procedures and maximize the use of educational resources to produce better results. Without tackling the digital gap that exists between those from rich and underprivileged backgrounds, as well as those in advanced and less-developed locations, the benefits of online/digital education cannot be completely tapped. This calls for ongoing, coordinated efforts, as shown by programs like the Digital India campaign and the availability of affordable computer equipment. It is critical to understand that issues of equality are successfully addressed by the deployment of technology (ICT) for online and digital education at all levels.

In order to reap the full benefit of ICT in education, the teachers require suitable training, making them update to make online educators more effective. It is usually unlikely that an excellent teacher in a conventional classroom would instantly succeed in a learning setting online. Online tests could need a new strategy in addition to pedagogical changes. When administering online tests on various scales, a variety of difficulties arise, including limitations on the kinds of questions that may be used in an online environment, assuring network reliability and power availability, and addressing worries about possible interruptions and unethical activity. The online/digital education environment has limits for certain courses and disciplines, such as performing arts, fine arts, and hands-on scientific projects, which may be partly solved by creative solutions. Online education also runs the danger of being unduly dependent on screen-based teaching and disregarding the social, emotional, and psychomotor elements of learning unless experiential, practical, and activity-based learning are incorporated into it.

It is a continuous journey rather than a destination to establish a specialized unit to build world-class digital infrastructure, instructional digital content, and technological capability in education. It's critical to have the ability to coordinate different education ecosystem stakeholders in order to achieve policy goals. A specialized division should be created within the Ministry of Education to address the demands of e-education at both the school and higher education levels. It is crucial to create a dynamic ecosystem that can address India's challenges of scale, diversity, and equity while also adapting to the constantly changing technological landscape, which is constantly shortening its half-life with each passing year. This is because technology is rapidly evolving and requires specialized expertise in order to deliver high-quality e-learning.

As of now there are at least 28 Digital Initiative of Government of India in Higher Education namely:

i) SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds)

ii) SWAYAM PRABHA
iii) National Academic Depository (NAD)
iv) National Digital Library of India (NDL India)
v) E-Shodh Sindhu (eSS)
vi) Virtual Labs
vii) e-Yantra
viii) Talk to a Teacher program
ix) E-acharya
x) E-Kalp
xi) FOSSEE (Free/Libre and Open-Source Software in Education)
xii) Vidwan
xiii) Spoken Tutorial
xiv) BAADAL
xv) Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN)
xvi) National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)
xvii) IMPRINT- (IMPacting Research INnovation and Technology)
xviii) SAKSHAT: A One Stop Education Portal
xix) Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA)
xx) Know Your College
xxi) DigiLocker
xxii) The National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)
xxiii) ShodhGangotri
xxiv) OSCAR (Open-Source Courseware Animations Repository)
xxv) Virtual Learning Environment
xxvi) Text Transcription of Video content
xxvii) SOS Tools
xxviii) e-PG Pathshala

*The Regional Scenario: Distribution of Physical Assets*

The equipment of educational institutions as well as the educational directorates and miseries of education of the states are neither equally equipped nor adequately equipped to take the advantages of ICT application in education. State governments may strive to improve the use of ICT in education, particularly in public schools, but typically these institutions lack the necessary physical infrastructure for integrating digital technology into the classroom. A 2015-16 report by the "National University of Educational Planning and Administration" (NUEPA) found that as low as only 62.81 percent of all the schools in India had much necessary electricity

connection, where as the primary-only and upper primary-only schools trail the pack at as low as 52.40 percent and 49.86 percent correspondingly.

The situation is so poor that only 19.45 percent of schools in Jharkhand were electrified, followed by a little better 25.55 percent in Assam, 28.54 percent in Meghalaya, as well as 28.80 percent in Madhya Pradesh. Schools are at the similar time even less likely to have access to ICT to use – the same report recorded that a paltry 27.31 percent of schools in India had a computer, where 10.36 percent of primary-only and 19.78 percent of upper primary-only schools had computers.

Furthermore, only 9.37 percent of schools in Bihar, 10.28 percent of schools in Jharkhand, 10.76 percent of schools in Assam, 12.67 percent of schools in West Bengal, and 12.70 percent of schools in Chhattisgarh possessed a computer. In Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest state, on the other hand, less than 25 per cent of secondary students studied at schools with a computer, the lowest reported rate nationwide. Even if the schools are connected to the grid and are lucky to have access to technology, a chronic electricity shortage makes technology difficult to use. By the year 2021-22, India's power deficit is predicted to reach 5.6 percent according to a 2015 industry report by Assocham and PwC, making this constraint even more severe. Both the inadequate electrical infrastructure and the limited digital infrastructure needed to be expanded for the rural schools to reap the benefit the most from ICT driven development.

*Major challenges*

While taking a leap forward towards taking advantage of the demographic window that has already opened with the application of ICT, the NEP 2020 faces a few challenges to be implemented smoothly and universally.

a) Increasing the variety of approved platforms to raise learning standards.

b) Promoting excellent and useful research that can be used right away in classrooms and gradually implementing cost-effective solutions.

c) Conducting interesting training sessions for instructors and students.

d) Modifying the curriculum structure to include modern information and integrate ICT.

e) Producing more material in regional tongues to uphold cultural norms.

f) Making sure that allowed material is provided in plain and simple language to avoid misunderstandings and communication gaps.

g) Ensuring that ICT usage includes human teachers while acknowledging the crucial function of "emotions."

h) Creating an integrated authority in charge of monetizing elements affecting the adoption of ICTs at the local level.

i) Promoting an innovative mindset among students and teachers in regards to technology.

j) Making clear the teacher's responsibilities while using ICTs.

k) Preparing students to take on new advocacy roles for education.

## CONCLUSION

India being a youthful country where as high as 67% of the total population in the working age group. A policy towards universalization of education creation of knowledge power with proper skill and training is very much essential. As India has good potentiality to become

knowledge hub in the 21st century world, NEP 2020 is believed to be designed to reap the demographic dividend, overshadowing demographic bulging leading to population explosion. The dream of universal G.E.R for the children is an excellent proposition. However, the N.E.P 2020 lacks in the direction to clearly spelt-out provisions for fund that may be required to implement the policy. As the N.E.P. comes after a long period (after N.E.P. 1986) is brings a new hope particularly, in the young generation who are presently in the fold of educational institutions and aspire to enter the job market, the implementation of the same seems to be little difficult. Education being in the concurrent list of the constitution, Central Government can't implement it unilaterally. Taking into confidence, the provincial governments is also a necessity. A large diversity in terms of language, religion cast and creed may also pose certain challenges in the path of implementing much hyped NEP 2020. In spite of above-mentioned limitations and challenges, the NEP 2020 may prove to be game changer, in terms of reaping demographic dividend pulling India into a status of super power, is not militarily, certainly in terms of knowledge power.

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