

Comments on the Draft New Education Policy with particular reference to Teacher Education and National Research Foundation

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Abstract

Government of India has sought the comments on Draft NEP 2019 submitted by the committee under the Chairmanship of Dr.K.Kasturirangan latest by 31st July 2019. Accordingly, the Indian Institute Public of Administration (IIPA), Tirupati local branch, Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Institute of Advanced Study in Education (IASE) of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, conducted a Symposium on the Draft New Education Policy (NEP), 2019, focusing on higher education on 31-7-2019. I was a participant in the Symposium. After a thorough reading of the Draft on NEP, it is noted that the Draft Report contains four parts covering 484 pages viz., Part – I: School Education; Part – II: Higher Education; Part – III: Additional Key Focus Areas and Part-IV; Transforming Education. I have presented a few comments on Teacher Education and National Education Funding besides commenting on two additional key focus areas viz., Vocational Education and Adult Education in the symposium. In this paper, I tried to provide the comments on Teacher Education (Chapter 15) and National Education Funding (Chapter 14) under Higher Education System, which I had made in the Symposium for wider deliberations among the Teacher Educators and also the academies/researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the Draft NEP has been reviewed and comments have been made on various sub-heads/ aspects relating to the two chapters viz., Teacher Education and National Education Foundation. Suggestions/ alternatives were provided wherever possible. For example, comparing of B.Ed. degree with other undergraduate degrees like agriculture, medicine and law was opposed as the B.Ed., is a different one and no comparison should be made. The author has appreciated certain aspects, which are new in the Policy. Example, the NRF aims to induct a true culture of research into the universities and also boon to others viz., academics, researchers, governments, industries etc.

TEACHER EDUCATION

The committee has provided the policy guidelines in Chapter 15 of the Draft Policy in pages 283 to 292. The objective of teacher education is to 'Ensure that teachers are given the highest quality training in content, pedagogy and practice, by moving the teacher education system into multi-disciplinary colleges and universities, and establishing the four-year integrated Bachelor's Degree as the minimum qualification for all school teachers' (P.283). The above objective is misleading and stating that teacher education system shall be offered four year integrated Bachelor's degree through multidisciplinary colleges, which is not appropriate. It does not

include the concern of education and training of teacher educators anywhere. Hence, the objective of teacher education should be 'to ensure that teachers and teacher educators are given the highest quality training and education in theory and practice of perspectives, pedagogy and co-curricular aspects' (Singh, Sunil Kumar, 2019).

The Committee has stated that the four-year B.Ed. degree will be on par with the other undergraduate degrees like agriculture, medicine, law, etc., and students with a four-year B.Ed., will be eligible to take up a Master's degree programme. But, the teacher education program shall not be compared with other professional courses like agriculture, medicine and law, as this is a different programme and its importance is not equated with those courses. Thus, unnecessary comparisons should not be made.

As stated that to educate future teachers, the B.Ed., programme would be started in collaboration with other departments such as, psychology, philosophy, sociology, neurosciences, Indian languages, arts, history and literature as well as various specialised subjects such as science and mathematics. But, three important disciplines namely, geography, economics, and anthropology are left out. Thus, the above disciplines may be added there to have a correct perspective of the interdisciplinary nature of education.

The committee in its sub-head P15.1.1 has categorically pointed out that the substandard and dysfunctional Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) that do not meet the basic educational criteria will be closed. This effort will be launched in a mission mode by MHRD with strong political will, positive administrative intent, and an effective implementation strategy. It seems that the Committee is serious about restoring the quality in TEIs. It appears as if, till now, it was not serious and now onwards it will change the system and improve. However, it is a good step towards improving the quality of Teacher Education.

The committee specified that the four-year Integrated Bachelor of Education programme for teacher preparation will be offered at multi-disciplinary institutions as an undergraduate programme of study, including both disciplinary and teacher preparation courses. If we offer a four year Integrated Bachelor of Education programme through multi-disciplinary institutions as an under-graduate program of study, the quality will be in question and thus, the four year Integrated B.Ed., programme may not be advisable. In the existing system of teacher education, the students are coming with disciplinary knowledge. In the proposed multi-disciplinary system, the disciplinary knowledge and also the professional knowledge both will be at stake.

As mentioned in P15.2.1 (para 4), if the current two-year B.Ed. programme is continued until 2030, there is no clear explanation about the continuation of two year B.Ed., programme by those multidisciplinary institutions only which are offering the four-year integrated B.Ed. programme. Further, it was mentioned in P15.2.1 that if the pre-service program is withdrawn after 2030, only in-service program is allowed. As the committee recommended that the teacher education will be offered by multi-disciplinary institutions with having expertise across disciplines or core areas of education, and have a strong theory-practice connect, but in practice that will not work, because of different reasons.

In the sub-head P15.3 of page 288, except describing the strengthening of Departments of Education in universities as spaces for research and innovation in education, there is no concrete focus on offering of M.Ed., course in a specific manner. However, it was mentioned that the Departments of Education and Centers of Excellence in Teacher Education will be set up at some universities, which are interested. Further, except mentioning, in the sub-head P15.3.5, that all faculty members will be encouraged to engage in the research and development of knowledge related to various specified aspects that need to be developed at the university through research and higher academic degrees including the M.A. in Education (Research),

as well as the doctoral programs of study (P15.3.7), no specific strategy was suggested by the committee to promote research in teacher education. Hence, there is a need to specify the strategies for promotion of research in teacher education.

In another sub-head (15.4), it was described that the Faculty of Teacher Education programmes must reflect the range of specialisations from multidisciplinary perspectives that are required for teacher preparation today. The practices of teacher preparation, which are mentioned in P15.4.1, ‘an induction and orientation course will be made available for such faculty before they take up teaching duties’ is a good step towards teacher preparation. Faculty members in universities and colleges need to have opportunities to develop their own understanding of the development of education and need to be inducted and exposed to the contemporary pedagogic practices, which are described in P15.5 and the in-service Continuous Professional Development for college and university teachers will continue at HRDCs (P15.5.2) are some of the positive steps provided in the Draft NEP. However, these training opportunities are already there in the existing system.

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

The National Research Foundation (NRF), which was referred in Chapter 14 (PP.265 - 282), will be set up through an Act of Parliament, as an

autonomous body of the Government of India, is an innovative idea to support academics, researchers, ministries, governments, industries etc (P14.1.1). There was a mention that NRF will be given an annual grant of INR 20,000 crores (~ 0.1% of GDP); this will be increased progressively over the next decade as the country’s capacity for quality research is developed. The committee has mentioned the primary scope of the Foundation (P14.1.2) which include— funding research in all disciplines across the academic landscape through a competitive, peer-review based process; building research capacity at academic institutions across the country; creating beneficial linkages between researchers, government and industry to ensure that the most urgent national issues are researched; and recognising outstanding research through special prizes and seminars.

Further, the Foundation will provide competitive funding for outstanding research proposals across all the disciplines (P14.1.3). It also has four major divisions to start with— Sciences, Technology, Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities, which will have an associated Divisional Council (P14.1.5) - Private institutions will also get funding for projects. The other research funding agencies like Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Indian Council of Agricultural Research

(ICAR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), University Grants Commission (UGC) etc., will also function in addition to NRF.

The idea is very relevant and it would definitely induct a true culture of research into the universities that are by and large devoid of such a culture. We must appreciate the Committee for this innovative idea that would help universities in the country in making a fresh rigorous beginning in this area of research. However, the following few suggestions are made on the functions of the NRF.

Regarding the eligibility for receiving funding (P14.1.9), it is mentioned that the researchers from all educational institutions, universities, colleges and schools, both public and private, as well as from research institutions, will be eligible to compete for funding from the NRF. But, no mention was made about the part-time or full time basis and also not mentioned anything about the eligibility of retired professors from the colleges and universities and if so, the eligibility up to which age.

In the draft report under sub-head P14.2.1, it is mentioned that each Divisional Council of the NRF would make public calls for research proposals every year and that such proposals would be peer reviewed, etc. (p.274). Instead of fixing a date to call research proposals, it is better that submission of research proposals is allowed on a continuing basis throughout the year (Khajapeer, M., 2019). Tying up of

the submission of research proposals by a mandated date would result in delaying the activity of research in general. What is the advantage that is derived by calling research proposals once a year? If the researchers are permitted to submit their research proposals any time and their finalisation is taken up when the respective Divisional Councils meet, the time lag that would be stretched otherwise might get reduced. Therefore, this section (P14.2.1) on calling research proposals should be suitably modified.

The draft policy has not made any suggestion on the consumption of research findings that emerge from such researches done by the universities and the other research institutions with the support of the NRF funds. Unless the research findings are transformed into a practice to serve a particular purpose, research done would not be of any use and investment made in the project will become futile. Even the researchers will not pay much attention and will not take much serious if their findings and suggestions are not being used by the private or public institutions. It suggests that the research findings should be properly harnessed for the purposes of use and thereby to their contribution to the development of the nation. However, in the sub-head P14.2.7, there was a mention that all the intellectual property rights, including publications and patents, of NRF-funded research will

be retained solely by those carrying out the research, while giving the government (including any of its assigned agencies) the license to use, practice, or implement the research or invention (or any of its output) for the public good without payment of any royalty or charge.

The Committee stated on page 276 under sub-head P14.3.1 (a), that the serving, retired or close to retirement faculty at research universities and institutions who are still active in research may choose to serve as Research Mentors at State Universities. Further, there was a mention (P14.3.1b) that there will be no age limit for Mentors; they will be permitted to serve as Mentors and apply for funding for as long as they are active and add value to their institutions. The talents of outstanding retired research faculty in the country are currently severely underutilised; this will be an invaluable opportunity to employ their expertise to expand research culture across the country.

The committee has also specified (P14.3.4) that the NRF as part of capacity building, applicants from institutions where research is only in nascent stages, but who submit research proposals of the level that could potentially be funded by the NRF, will be assisted by one or more mentors at the NRF, who will be specifically commissioned by the NRF for this purpose— to help bring the writing of the research applications up to the quality levels sought by

the NRF, before the application is put through the official review process of Subject Committees. In this context, it is suggested that the NRF may also specify to conduct the training courses on Writing Research Proposals in the research institutions periodically so as to encourage the fresh and budding scholars and faculty members. However, there was a mention in P14.3.5 that the academies can contribute greatly to capacity building for teachers and for researchers; their members can be mentors to university departments and colleges as these institutions seek to improve the quality of their teaching and research.

The NRF will help in playing this linking role between research being conducted in the country and the relevant government entities (both Central and State), which makes it much more difficult for breakthroughs in research and innovation to be implemented for the benefit of society. The NRF will also help link both researchers and the government with industry, in order to increase collaboration and synergy of purpose with respect to research, innovation, and implementation among all three parties (P14.4). The NRF will offer its expertise to ministries for their research needs (P14.4.1)— Research requirements of State Governments will also be met by the NRF (P14.4.2).

The other important feature of NRF will be instituting a system of awards for truly successful research taking

place in the nation, and also organise national seminars and public lectures on outstanding research to encourage the award-winning researchers as well as other scholars (P14.5.1). In this connection, it is a good measure for promoting the research and also disseminating the results of outstanding research for the benefit of the people concerned. Further, it is suggested that priority shall be given

for the action research studies, which will facilitate to solve the problems of marginalised, poor and downtrodden people particularly women. Thus, the establishment of NRF is a boon for all the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), academies, researchers, governments, industries, etc., and it is also help the researches to facilitate and participate in the development of the country.

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