

The National Research Foundation – Does it have all What it Desired for?

Abstract

The draft national education policy 2019 strongly advocates a Research Foundation at the national level (chapter 14, p. 264) to promote research in varied academic disciplines. This idea, not a new one, has however been given due recognition for the first time in this draft policy. The draft has tried to articulate the objectives, functions and operational modalities for visualisation education in a new outlook in great detail. There are however several aspects, which are worthy to include in visualising the Research Foundation holistically. This paper tries to indicate some of the possibilities, which may strengthen the significance of its importance.

The Context

Research in education across academic disciplines has emerged as an essential phenomenon in the contemporary world. Its roots can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century with the revival of common schools[i]. In India, the importance of research has been recognised right from post-independence. The Mudaliar Commission Report (1953)[ii] of the Secondary Education Commission has recommended establishing Central Research Organisation to carry out research in the field of education and vocational guidance with primary focus on curricular and pedagogical research, testing of cognitive and non-cognitive domains and improving the functional efficiency of school buildings. The National Policy of Education (1968)[iii] advised providing academic freedom to teachers to pursue and publish independent studies and researches. It also advocated giving equal importance to research along with science education, technical education and postgraduation courses (p.41, point 7; p.42. point 8b; p.43. point 12c). The National Policy on Education (1986–as modified in 1992), made a beginning

within the restructuring of courses at the undergraduate level. The center of advanced studies were set-up in accordance with that, for post-graduation and research (p.3 point 1.7a). Recommendations were made for steps to provide enhanced support and ensure high quality research outputs. It was suggested to make efforts to set-up a national research facility within the university system, with an autonomous system (p.19, point 5.32) be made. The primary aim laid out for the research was to produce quality manpower capable of researches and development, which will work towards improving present technologies and enhancing production and productivity (p.22. point 6.13). A report on 'Negotiating the Big Leap' (IIM, 2008)[iv] recognised that the quality and quantity of research carried out by them has not been commensurate with the status they have in the country. The report of the committee on 'Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education' (2009)[v] considers that research and teachers are inseparable in terms of the fact that effective and efficient teaching requires research.

In the report 'Taking IITs to Excellence and Greater Relevance' by Dr Anil Kakodkar

Committee (2011)^[vi] advocates the establishment of research parks at all the IITs similar to that established at IIT Madras, to enable industry-academia collaborations and build a Research and Innovation ecosystem.

The National Research Foundation - Glimpses of Recommendations in NEP 2019

The draft policy advocates a long pending and highly desired initiative and emphasizes the importance of research and innovation across academic disciplines (chapter 14, page 265) at the national level of this idea is detailing done under five broad sections –

1. Establishing a new National Research Foundation
2. Funding research proposals through rigorous peer review
3. Building research capacity at all universities and colleges
4. Creating beneficial linkages among government, industry, and researchers
5. Recognising outstanding research funded by the National Research Foundation through awards and national seminars

The observations in this write-up have been presented in a similar sequence. These in the document have been developed through reflections from previous education policies and committee reports, the experience of conducting researches in different settings in the Indian context and some global context.

Before proceeding to section-wise discussions, the context of setting-up of the research foundation also needs to be discussed.

- The context has been well put primarily from economical perspective, but undermines the social context of India which has a great diversity and lots of social issues that need to be dealt with.
- The ‘Innovation’ has not been paid desirable attention, the question how it comes with research and with what purpose. Requires greater explanation.

- The primary obstacles highlighted in the document seem to be the outcomes of key issues like non-availability of short and long terms research specific courses, ignoring the use of recommendations in program designing, planning and execution.

A New National Research Foundation

The necessity of integrations between education systems for primary, secondary and higher educations, has been widely recognised. This, however, seems missing in visualisation of the Research Foundation. Though it discusses the importance of research at the school level, school education is not given due importance to carry out research. The equal importance of research at the school level is worth considering. Decisions for reforming school education are presently based on experiences of academicians rather evidence of research studies. Teachers are required to be equipped with the necessary capacity, resources and autonomy to carry out researches rather than engaging them in dozens of non-academic activities. Besides the involvement of teachers in non-academic activities outside and inside the school, the teachers are also engaged in gathering, consolidating and sharing information from time to time, but they are not aware about how this information can be useful in improving the performance of their schools. If their involvement is ensured in a manner that also develops them as a professional practitioner then they can make their classrooms and the school more effective. And if teachers carry out the research themselves, it can make this happen smoothly. This if done properly can reduce the need for annual and biannual examination of students and they can get more time to engage with children in classrooms.

Funding Research Proposals through Rigorous Peer Review

The document articulates this section well. However the description is more about the

operational modalities. A detailed description of the process for the selection of individuals and organization to carry out researches will be useful. If the members comprising the central level approval committee have an excellent track record of publication of researches in Indian context so that they understand the national context well. It will have a lot of advantage there is a also need to describe the kind of research required to be carried out in the current context of public education in India where everything is guided by decision-making authority rather than the decisions are informed by research.

Building Research Capacity at all Universities and Colleges

In the Indian context, this is the most neglected area, and has a direct bearing on inadequacy and non-desirable quality of researches. The NRF too does not give appropriate attention to this issue. Though, the National Research Foundation talks about building research capacity, it is only limited to providing fellowships to doctoral and post-doctoral students at universities and college level.

The National Research Foundation must advocate some independent courses to create talent in the field of educational research. The courses can be of variety. They could be in the form a of certificate, a diploma, graduate, or a postgraduate courses under the different paradigms of areas; Certificate course in specific research like ethnographic research, development research tools, sample and sampling, etc. can also be recommended.

Creating Beneficial Linkages Among Government, Industry, and Researchers

This has been defined well and talks about the linkages among various organs of the public sector and how research can integrate departments like industry, research, education, agriculture, etc. As of now no

such efforts exist and this aspect will connect different organs systematically.

Recognising Outstanding Research Funded by the National Research Foundation through Awards and National Seminars

This section talks about recognising and appreciating them through awards, prizes and presentations in seminars. Here the NRF needs to move forward from this step. Proper impetus must be given to support the best researches to become part of the global research dialogue.

Some Additional Thoughts

In addition to these, there are some other observations that could be considered to further strengthen the research practices. These are presented ahead:

1. Our curriculum at the school level, both elementary and secondary level, does not have provisions for systematic observations, collection of data, its analysis and interpretation, which needs to be incorporated in the curriculum explicitly. From the level of secondary education, the research methods may be counted as a separate optional subject to increase and improve focus on research practices.
2. The draft document rarely discusses about the dissemination of research studies. There should be multiple channels to strategically disseminate research findings not only within our territory but globally too. This is important to establish and to make other countries aware of the researches carried out by us and establishing the credibility of our research internationally.
3. The quality of researches carried out in most colleges and universities especially as part of projects for master and doctoral degrees are not of great quality. There are several reasons for this, e.g. less support

from the concerned faculty members, absence of quality check parameters, duplication of already conducted research studies, etc. There will be no surprise if many of the researches carried out for the accomplishment of masters and doctoral degrees are found guilty of plagiarism. The proposed foundation can support this by developing an online portal and plagiarism check a mechanism of review. There can be processes like self-certification where the researchers confirm no unfair means have been used in any form in the research.

4. The Foundation should develop ethical guidelines to carry out research in the Indian context. As of now, one can easily find violations of ethical guidelines as suggested by different international bodies. Collecting data without informing the respondent with true objectives, no practice of written consent from the respondent, compelling to respond to questions which the respondents do not want to respond, etc. are some of the key prevalent practices in our country.
5. Whatever fund for researches is coming to individuals, institutions or universities in India it must be under information to the foundation so that they could keep a track of it.
6. There could be a research portal, which will have a brief of all kind of researches carried out at different levels to make the readers aware of the breath of work and learn from it.
7. There can be a pool of research resource persons at the national level or its branches at the regional level where the research scholars could get support for improving the quality of their researches.
8. There must be a mechanism to track the NRF activities so that its performance can be gauged regarding the quality of publications, increase of Indian participation in reputed international

journals, the number of meaningful invitation from prestigious conferences and acceptance of papers for presentations rather than merely utilisation of fund.

9. The selection for the Foundation must have strict criteria like publication in reputed national and international journals, appreciation of researches at different platforms, citations in other researches, their use in teaching of concerned subjects, etc.

Conclusions

This is a crucial step in education and can help to improve the decision making in planning, the efficiency of teaching learning, creation of a pool of talent in the field of research and access to carry out researches and their dissemination globally.

Though the document discusses the importance of innovations, it hardly elaborates on what innovation is and how research and in nation are linked. This component can be given more space as it is rarely discussed or it can be discussed separately without placing it with the National Research Foundation.

- i. Travers, R.M.W. *How Research has Changed American Schools: A History from 1840 to the Present*. Kalamazoo, MI: Mythos Press, 1983), 7.
- ii. Ministry of Education – *Mudaliar Commission Report (1953): Report of the Secondary Education Commission, India*.p.100
- iii. Ministry of Human Resource and Development – (1968): *National Policy on Education, India* p.39 (4.2c).
- iv. Ministry of Human Resource and Development (2008): *Negotiating the Big Leap; Government of India, Department of Higher Education*
- v. *The Report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education* (2009) By Prof. Yaspal.
- vi. *Taking IITs to Excellence and Greater Relevance* (2011): Report of Dr. Anil Kakodkar Committee