

Education Reforms under NEP 2020: Emergence of MERUs in Accordance with NEP Philosophy

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Abstract

Administering knowledge today requires a shift from imparting theoretical education to more skill based, applied knowledge and outcome-based learning. The teaching methodology needs to be more learners centric that fosters global competency given the changing education landscape. The true essence of education lies in the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and truth as emphasized in our ancient knowledge system. The New Education Policy 2020 is a visionary policy of the Government of India that aims to align the education system of India with the shifting paradigms in technology and the global needs of our country. The NEP also forms part of the Governments' vision to make India a self-reliant and prosperous economy by 2047. Multidisciplinary education hence, will equip them to engage meaningfully with global challenges and help them contribute towards innovative solutions. Towards a more holistic and multidisciplinary education as mentioned in the NEP 2020 aims to develop all capacities of human beings be it aesthetics, intellectual, social, emotional and physical in an integrated manner. The NEP 2020 seeks to establish an advanced model of Multi University called the MERU that will result in creation of new pace setting institutions in the liberal arts and multidisciplinary education and research. The current study focuses on the varied aspects of Multidisciplinary education as emphasized in the NEP 2020 and an attempt has been made to list down the roadblocks that may be faced in the implementation of the policy.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary Education, MERUs, Multi University

Introduction

The true essence of education lies in the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and truth as emphasized in our ancient knowledge system. Learning must lead to 360 degree development of the learner in terms of social, physical, mental and emotional evolution. Since the ancient times of Nalanda and Takshila, the history of education in India has administered the holistic aspect of education. Based on those lines institutions worldwide have implemented the concept of liberal arts that implies all disciplines co-exist as reflection of multidisciplinarity. In this regard the NEP 2020 is a visionary policy of the Government of India that aims to align the education system of India with the shifting paradigms in technology and the global needs of our country. In today's disruptive times it is important to understand that no discipline can be taught in isolation and the impact of technology and artificial intelligence cannot be negated anymore. Thereby, NEP envisages the idea of holistic learning to the students through multidisciplinarity. The model of holistic education aims to integrate boundaries of various disciplines of education.

Administering knowledge requires a shift from imparting theoretical understanding/ education to more skill based, applied knowledge and outcome-based learning. The teaching methodology aims/ needs to be more learners centric that fosters global competency given the changing education landscape. It means if the learner is unable to understand the way in which we teach then we must start teaching in ways that the learner understands. Given the global challenges of the 21st century, students need to stay abreast of a multitude of development across various fields. The shifting technological, environmental and economic landscape demands that students cultivate a broad knowledge base and develop critical thinking.

Multidisciplinary education hence, will equip them to engage meaningfully with global challenges and help them contribute towards innovative solutions. Towards a more holistic and multidisciplinary education as mentioned in the NEP 2020 aims to develop all capacities of human beings be it aesthetics, intellectual, social, emotional and physical in an integrated manner. Such an education would create holistic and complete individuals equipped with key 21st century skills.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the need to adopt a new education policy and Multidisciplinary education
- To highlight the key points in NEP 2020 related to Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education
- To study the emergence of Multidisciplinary Education and Research University (MERUs)
- To understand the bottlenecks in implementing Multidisciplinary approach in Higher Education

Need for the New Education Policy: A step towards Multidisciplinary- Any policy however good it is, requires restructuring keeping in view the requirements of the changing world. The previous education policies were designed to meet the 20th century classroom needs. 34 years hence, there have been immense changes in the socio-economic set-up and massive technological transformation. The world around us is undergoing massive change in the field of science, communication and technology.

To learn and adapt to this change, demands the students to acquire new set of skills that are relevant to the 21st century. Previous education policies were contemporary to the time they were drafted and incorporated into our education system. With changing times, a revision in the education system was not only necessary but also imperative, keeping in mind (considering) the evolving education landscape across the world and the shifting dynamics of a developing economy like India.

Today disciplines cannot exist in isolation, reflecting the growing recognition that complex real-world situations require interdisciplinary thinking. With the advancement in technology and its' integration with various disciplines, the lines separating the disciplines are increasingly getting blurred. Todays' job market is such that it requires students to be multiskilled across fields, making discipline specific expertise less practical. Hence the integration of diverse knowledge systems leads not only to holistic understanding and innovative problem-solving skills. The new NEP aims to be a positive step towards transforming the country's education system through flexibility, practical and experiential learning.

The NEP aims to re-orient the content and process of education to develop holistic learners who would possess skills like critical thinking, creativity, team work, social responsibility and multilingualism. As a positive step towards multidisciplinary, students will have flexibility in choice of courses and can engage in both arts and science stream.

A major plus point that can be deduced from the above many points is flexible learning framework that this NEP provides to its learners, enabling them to up skill and reskill themselves making the environment more learner centric and learning joyful.

Emergence of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) in congruence with NEP Philosophy

The NEP 2020 seeks to establish an advanced model of Multi University called the MERU at par with IITs and IIMs with the long-term strategic vision to make India a global destination in Education, Research and Development. The proposed MERUs will promote interdisciplinary research among students in alignment with the national education priorities.

The concept of MERU will result in creation of new pace setting institutions in the liberal arts and multidisciplinary education and research. Single stream HEIs shall no longer operate and will be replaced by multidisciplinary institutions that will offer atleast 2 programmes of major in arts & humanities, atleast 2 in science and maths and atleast 1 in social science. Many HEIs like the IITs are already operating at multidisciplinary levels with most of them offering courses like MBA, PG Diploma in Finance and operations

etc. apart from the courses offered by them originally. The following section shall discuss about the benefits accorded to the MERUs, List of approved universities as MERUs,

How MERUs can transform the educational set up

- MERUs will receive grants from the Central Government under the Pradhan Mantri Uchattar Sikhsa Abhiyan PM-USHA Scheme. They will have opportunity to grow and improve their accreditation with the help of such funds.
- There shall be clustering and resource sharing between MERUs and between constituent college within each MERU
- MOUs will be signed with Industries for collaborations vis-à-vis appointment of professors of practice, visiting faculty from industry, internships in industry, R&D labs & Public sectors. This will create an environment that will facilitate start up and innovation.
- Internship and apprenticeship embedded degree programmes to be incorporated under MERUs
- Imparting knowledge through Online and Distance Learning (ODL) and SWAYAM and other Massive Online Courses (MOOCs). There shall be Digital Nodal Centres for digitising academic content and resources.
- **Attracting Students from Abroad-** The NEP 2020 proposes to advocate India as global destination for Research and Development. As such MERUs can act as a catalyst in attracting students from abroad through the '**Study in India**' initiative of the Government. The MERUs can collaborate with foreign universities to allow students to pursue programmes combining coursework. The students may get degree with credits earned abroad through student exchange programmes or research collaborations. Enhanced academic collaboration through student exchange programmes will foster synergy between diverse fields of study.
- **Collaboration with Indian Universities-** Collaborations can be done with other Indian universities so that students shall have the flexibility to choose courses across disciplines. If a particular subject is not available in an institution where they take admission then the institution shall collaborate with multiple institutions to provide that to the students. The credits will be transferred through the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC).
- **Internship & Apprenticeship at Local Industries-** As a part of holistic education, MERUs can provide with **opportunities for internships in local industries**, businesses, artists, craft persons etc. This may allow the students to gain hands-on practical learning that shall further improve their employability.
- **MERUs as model Public Universities-** They can act as model public universities that shall be at par with the IITs and IIMs and will help attain global standards in education.

With the aim of providing multidisciplinary education across the country under the NEP 2020, a total of 35 universities have been identified that have received approval as MERUs. These universities shall receive grant under the PM-USHA scheme. Under the first meeting of the Project Approval Board (PAB-1) the following universities have been listed:

Approval of Universities under MERU (Phase-1)

S no.	State/UT	Institution Name	District	Total amount approved (Rs in Crore)
01	Andhra Pradesh	Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visva Vidyalayam, Tirupathi	Chittoor	100.00
02	Assam	Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	100.00

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03	Chhattisgarh	Shaheed Mahendra Karma Vishwavidyalaya, Jagdalpur	Bastar	100.00
04	Goa	Goa University, Goa	North Goa	99.99
05	Gujarat	Saurashtra University, Rajkot	Rajkot	100.00
06	Gujarat	Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat	Surat	100.00
07	Himachal Pradesh	Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla	Shimla	100.00
08	Jharkhand	Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribagh	Hazaribagh	99.79
09	Karnataka	Rani Channamma University, Belagavi	Belagavi	100.00
10	Karnataka	Bangalore University, Bangalore	Bengaluru Urban	100.00
11	Madhya Pradesh	Barkatullah University, Bhopal	Bhopal	100.00
12	Madhya Pradesh	Jiwaji University, Gwalior	Gwalior	100.00
13	Madhya Pradesh	Vikram University, Ujjain	Ujjain	100.00
14	Maharashtra	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad	Chhatrapati Sambhaji agar (Aurangabad)	100.00
15	Maharashtra	Gondwana University, Gadchiroli	Gadchiroli	100.00
16	Maharashtra	Smt. Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, Mumbai	Mumbai	100.00
17	Maharashtra	Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Solapur University, Solapur	Solapur	100.00
18	Rajasthan	Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur	Jodhpur	100.00

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19	Telangana	Palamuru University, Mahabubnagar	Mahbubnagar	100.00
20	Uttar Pradesh	Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Awadh University, Faizabad	AYODHYA	100.00
21	Uttar Pradesh	Mahatama Jyotiba Phule Rohikhand University, Bareilly	Bareilly	100.00
22	Uttar Pradesh	Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur	Gorakhpur	100.00
23	Uttar Pradesh	Bundelkhand University, Jhansi	Jhansi	100.00
24	Uttar Pradesh	University of Lucknow	Lucknow	100.00
25	Uttar Pradesh	Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut	Meerut	100.00
26	Uttarakhand	Kumaun University, Nainital	Nainital	100.00

Source: 1st meeting of Project Approval Board of PM-USHA

In the third meeting of the of Project Approval Board (PAB 3) following universities got approval under the component of MERUs:

Approval of Universities under MERU (Phase-2)

S no.	State/UT	Institution Name	District	Total amount approved (Rs in Crore)
01	Bihar	Lalit Narayan Mithila University	Darbhanga	100
02	Bihar	Patna University	Patna	100
03	Kerala	Kannur University	Kannur	100
04	Kerala	University of Calicut	Malappuram	100
05	Kerala	Thiruvananthapuram University of Kerala	Thiruvananthapuram	100
06	Odisha	Ravenshaw University,	Cuttack	100
07	Odisha	Berhampur University, Berhampur	Ganjam	100
08	Odisha	Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University	Mayurbhanj	100
09	Odisha	Sambalpur University	Sambalpur	100

Source: 3rd meeting of Project Approval Board of PM-USHA

The MERUs are all set to transform the educational system will a lot new reforms and changes in the existing framework. The aim is to create a practice based and skill driven system that would prepare the learners for the future challenges.

Implementation Roadblocks

The policy demonstrates a forward-looking approach with an aim to carry forward the legacy of the ancient Indian knowledge system and align it with the future sustainable development goals while also bestowing the youth with holistic and multidisciplinary learning. The introduction of MERUs shall prove to be a landmark decision in carving an international roadmap for India in the field of Education and research provided the implementation is monitored closely and the operational bottlenecks are identified and addressed promptly. Any policy is only as good as its implementation. The NEP may prove to be a big challenge for the policy makers, academicians and the students as well. It may be interesting to take a look at the roadblocks that may be faced in the implementation.

- **Challenges in multidisciplinarity, Curriculum and pedagogy**

The NEP promises to bring multidisciplinary opportunity through introduction of 3 language formula, teaching in the regional language or the language that the students understand. It is also giving an opportunity to choose from varied disciplines vis-à-vis a student of science can also opt for unrelated subjects like music, photography, history etc. Most institutions may struggle to implement this resulting in inconsistencies in teaching and learning as well.

The PG programme It would be a challenge for the institutions to provide a research centric environment for the students

- **Lack of adequate infrastructure facilities**

The policy calls for significant investment in infrastructure and resources but many institutions lack the necessary infrastructure to bring about a change in the curriculum pedagogy or implementation of technology driven learning models, particularly in the smaller and lesser developed regions

- **Accessibility and Affordability issues**

Owing to the regional disparity the policy outreach may not be uniform in all areas. The students in remote areas would lack access to quality schools and higher education institutions. Also, many quality institutions may be unaffordable which renders them with no option but to move towards low quality alternatives.

- **Fragmented implementation**

As alluring as it may sound but implementing the policy in all its stride would prove to be a challenge for the educational institutions. The implementation may not be uniform across states and institutions leading to differences in the quality of education.

- The state government which is the key stakeholders may face budgetary constraints making the implementation of reforms at the grassroot level a tough task.

- **Paucity of adequate training to the academicians**

With the coming up of new policy there would be increase in the quantum of work pedagogical as well as administrative given the designing of new curriculum and a comprehensive evaluation system. Changes made in the education system without providing adequate training and capacity building to develop competent teachers may hinder the purpose of the policy to bring holistic development.

Direction for further Research

Quantitative research can be done to understand the multitude of courses and programmes offered by the MERUs and their working model and how the transfer of credits are being done through the Academic Bank of Credit.

Conclusion- NEP as a policy will have to take a series of small steps, linking education to jobs and creating more opportunities for students to be gainfully employed . With the changing character of knowledge, the way of providing it has to be upgraded to meet up to the global requirements. The introduction of MERUs will seek to transform education by emphasizing flexible learning pathways and catering to diverse learners' needs. There shall always be limitations and challenges and an ideal situation shall be difficult to be reached, but hopefully the NEP 2020 will be successful in addressing the challenges and put Indian education on the global map, recreating the long and illustrious history of the ancient Indian knowledge system.

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