



Quality in Higher Education through the lens of National Education Policy-2020

Nusrat Bashir^{1*}, Rozia Bashir², Dr. Najmah Peerzada³

^{1*} Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir,
Email: nusratbashir.scholar@kashmiruniversity.net

² Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Email: rozia.bashir786@gmail.com

³ Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Kashmir,
Email: najmahpeerzada@hotmail.com

***Corresponding author:- Nusrat Bashir**

*Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir,
Email: nusratbashir.scholar@kashmiruniversity.net

Abstract

Quality Higher Education refers to the personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement and productive contribution to the society and prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles to enable economic independence. The purpose of quality higher education is not merely the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment but it is the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation. There is need for the formulation of expected learning outcomes for all higher education programmes for which National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) has been formulated in synchronisation with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). To build on the various elements in a synergistic manner, there is also a need to grow and catalyse quality research through National Research Foundation (NRF). Therefore, the present paper is aimed to study various domains, learning outcomes and objectives as recommended by NSQF, NHEQF and NRF respectively to ensure quality higher education in accordance to National Education Policy (NEP)- 2020.

CC License
CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

Key words: Higher Education, NEP, NHEQF, NSQF, NRF.

Introduction:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisaged a new and forward-looking vision for India's higher education system. It recognized that higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution - a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all. The NEP 2020 noted that higher education significantly contributes towards sustainable livelihoods and economic development of the nation and it shall help steer India towards a knowledge economy and society where more and more young Indians are likely to aspire for higher education.

The NEP 2020 also stated that for achieving the 21st century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals, enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level, develop character, ethical and Constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service, and capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical, and vocational subjects. It also stated that a quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society and prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence. It pointed out that at the societal level, higher education must enable the development of an enlightened, socially conscious, knowledgeable, and skilled nation that can find and implement robust solutions to its own problems. Higher education is expected to form the basis for knowledge creation and innovation thereby contributing to a growing national economy. It highlighted the purpose of quality higher education is more than the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment and represents the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation.

The NEP 2020 also called for a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to deliver high-quality higher education with equity and inclusion. The policy's vision includes several key changes to the current system by establishing multidisciplinary universities and colleges at district level and more higher education institutions (HEIs) across India. There is emphasis on the medium of instruction or programmes in local (mother tongue) and Indian languages. It also aimed to provide more multidisciplinary undergraduate education. Moreover, specific focus has been drawn on revamping the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and student support for enhanced student experiences.

Regulation of higher education has been too heavy-handed for decades as too much has been attempted to be regulated with too little effect. The mechanistic and disempowering nature of the regulatory system has been rife with very basic problems, such as heavy concentrations of power within a few bodies, conflicts of interest among these bodies, and a resulting lack of accountability. The regulatory system needs a complete overhaul to re-energize the higher education sector and enable it to thrive.

To address the above-mentioned issues, the regulatory system of higher education shall ensure that the distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard setting shall be performed by distinct, independent, and empowered bodies. This is considered essential to create checks-and-balances in the system, minimize conflicts of interest, and eliminate concentrations of power. To ensure that the four institutional structures carrying out these four essential functions work independently yet at the same time and work in synergy towards common goals. These four structures shall be set up as four independent verticals within one umbrella institution, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).

The first vertical of HECI is the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). It will function as the common, single point regulator for the higher education sector including teacher education and excluding medical and legal education, thus eliminating the duplication and disjunction of regulatory efforts by the multiple regulatory agencies that exist at the current time. It will require a relook and repealing of existing Acts and restructuring of various existing regulatory bodies to enable this single point regulation. NHERC will be set up to regulate in a 'light but tight' and facilitative manner, meaning that a few important matters particularly financial probity, good governance, and the full online and offline public self-disclosure of all finances, audits, procedures, infrastructure, faculty or staff, courses, and educational outcomes will be very effectively regulated. This information shall have to be made available and kept updated and accurate by all higher education institutions on a public website maintained by

NHERC and on the institutions' websites. Any complaints or grievances from stakeholders and others arising out of the information placed in public domain would be adjudicated by NHERC. Feedback from randomly selected students including differently-abled students at each HEI will be solicited online to ensure valuable input at regular intervals. The primary mechanism to enable such regulation will be accreditation.

The second vertical of HECI is a 'meta-accrediting body,' called the National Accreditation Council (NAC). Accreditation of institutions shall be based primarily on basic norms, public self-disclosure, good governance, and outcomes, and it will be carried out by an independent ecosystem of accrediting institutions supervised and overseen by NAC. The task to function as a recognized accreditor will be awarded to an

appropriate number of institutions by NAC. In the short term, a robust system of graded accreditation needs to be established, which will specify phased benchmarks for all HEIs to achieve set levels of quality, self-governance, and autonomy. In turn, all HEIs will aim, through their Institutional Development Plans (IDPs), to attain the highest level of accreditation over the next 15 years, and thereby eventually aim to function as self-governing degree-granting institutions. In the long run, accreditation will become a binary process, as per the extant global practice.

The third vertical of HECI is the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), which must carry out funding and financing of higher education based on transparent criteria, including the IDPs prepared by the institutions and the progress made on their implementation. HEGC should be entrusted with the disbursement of scholarships and developmental funds for launching new focus areas and expanding quality programme offerings at HEIs across disciplines and fields.

The fourth vertical of HECI is the General Education Council (GEC), which must frame expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes, also referred to as graduate attributes. A National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) must be formulated by the GEC and in synchronisation with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) to ease the integration of vocational education into higher education. Higher education qualifications leading to a degree or a diploma or a certificate will be described by the NHEQF in terms of such learning outcomes. In addition, the GEC will set up facilitative norms for issues, such as credit transfer, equivalence, etc., through the NHEQF. The GEC will be mandated to identify specific skills that students must acquire during their academic programmes, with the aim of preparing well-rounded learners with 21st century skills.

National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)

The National Skills Qualifications Framework provides a comprehensive framework that classifies qualifications based depending on a set of performance criteria that are approved nationally and comparable with international quality standards. Here qualification type refers to the broad discipline-free nomenclature such as a Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and Doctoral degree. The NSQF organises qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills, and aptitude. It comprises of 10 levels, representing increasing levels of complexity in terms of the knowledge, competence and autonomy that must be demonstrated by the learner.

There are five domains in NSQF described for 10 different levels as follows:

1.Process 2. Professional knowledge 3. Professional Skill 4. Core skill 5. Responsibility

NSQF organizes qualifications according to levels of knowledge skills and aptitude to facilitate interaction between general education, vocational education and training that have hitherto been operating as separate and independent variable. The levels are detailed definitions of learning outcomes that the learner must possess and demonstrate irrespective of whether the learning takes place through formal schooling or non-formal. It primarily aims at establishing interoperability through a national level quality assurance framework that is on par with international standards. As a competency framework it integrates vocational education and training, general education, technical education through various paths that show the higher order and levels of learning. It aims at providing flexibility with multiple entry and exit levels. One of the main objectives of NSQF is to facilitate easy entry into job market with desired skills and knowledge and continue learning and skill building for further qualifications. Certification and credit, transfer of credits, scoring more marks – establish equivalence. NSQF is derived in partnership with industry and prospective employers for validation of curriculum and upgrading with current knowledge and technologies.

The objectives of NSQF are:

- i. Accommodation of diverse Indian education and training systems
- ii. Development and implementation of set of qualifications for each level, based on outcomes that are accepted across the nation.
- iii. Development and streamlining of multiple progression pathways that provide access to qualification and help people in moving easily between different education and training stream and between industry sectors.

- iv. Consideration of Progression paths of their prior learning and experience through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessments.
- v. Support mechanism functioning for national regulatory and quality assurance measures for education and training.
- vi. Enhancement of international mobility of workforce through compliance with global standards.

National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF)

The NHEQF is a tool for establishing, organising, and recognising qualifications on a scale of 5 to 10, with levels 1 to 4 of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) address school education. The NHEQF represents a comprehensive framework that classifies qualifications based on a set of performance criteria, approved nationally and comparable with international quality standards. The NSQF provides a comprehensive framework that classifies qualifications based depending on a set of performance criteria that are approved nationally and comparable with international quality standards. Here qualification type refers to the broad discipline-free nomenclature such as a Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and Doctoral degree.

The main objectives of the NHEQF are as follows:

1. Setting up an integrated national framework for recognition and accreditation of qualifications offered by different types of institutions engaged in higher education that includes vocational education and training, as well as technical/professional education in India.
2. Providing proper guidance to the higher education providers with points of reference during the setting and assessing of academic standards, designing curricula, teaching/learning assessment strategies, periodic review of programmes.
3. Supporting prospective students, parents, high education providers, employers, and other stakeholders understand the nature and level of expected learning outcomes and defined graduate attributes.
4. Providing timely assistance to identify the potential progression pathways from one level of education to the higher level of education which include multiple entries, exits and re-entry options specifically in the context of learning in the long run.
5. Assurance of confidence in citizens in the prospect of higher education qualifications and academic standards by enabling public understanding of the defined learning outcomes, graduate attributes/profiles and academic achievement.
6. Assurance of the proper maintenance of national standards and international comparability of learning outcomes academic standards.
7. Enabling the maintenance and development of pathways that provide access to qualifications and assist people in moving between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market.
8. Providing necessary lifelong learning goals and processes to individuals on the basis for their progression in education and training.
9. Appropriate guidance for quality assurance arrangements in education and training offered by high education institutes. This also includes the specific guideline that the institutes must follow during the online assessment.
10. Enhancement of the national and international mobility of graduates and workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of the qualifications in the context of higher education in the country.

Learning Outcomes Descriptors for higher education qualification at levels 5-10 on the NHEQF

While Levels 1 to 4 are for school education, Level 5 onwards are for higher education. Level 5 of the NHEQF represents learning outcomes appropriate to the first year (first two semesters) of the undergraduate programme of study, Level 10 represents learning outcomes with greater complexity appropriate to the doctoral-level programmes of study. NHEQF also establishes the number of credits required to complete the different levels of the four-year undergraduate programme, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees, in accordance with the NEP's framework. Those looking to exit the UG programme with a certificate shall require 40 credits; with a diploma after two years shall need 80 credits; degree after three years shall have a

requirement of 120 credits; degree with honours/research after four years with 160 credits. One credit is equivalent to one hour of teaching (lecture or tutorial) or two hours of practical work/fieldwork per week.

Elements of NHEQF at 5-10 levels for assessment of students:

1. Knowledge and understanding.
2. Skills required to perform and accomplish tasks.
3. Application of knowledge and skills.
4. Generic learning outcomes.
5. Constitutional, humanistic, ethical, and moral values.
6. Employment ready skills, entrepreneurship skills and mindset.

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (NRF)

The Policy envisions a comprehensive approach to transforming the quality and quantity of research also and this include definitive shifts in school education to a more play and discovery based style of learning with emphasis on the scientific method and critical thinking. This includes career counselling in schools towards identifying student interests and talents, promoting research in universities, the multidisciplinary nature of all Higher Educational Institutions and the emphasis on holistic education, the inclusion of research and internships in the undergraduate curriculum, faculty career management systems that give due weightage to research, and the governance and regulatory changes that encourage an environment of research and innovation which are extremely critical for developing a research mindset in the country.

To build on the various elements in a synergistic manner, and to grow and catalyse quality research in the nation, this policy thus, envisions the establishment of a National Research Foundation (NRF) thereby truly. The crucial goal of the NRF is to enable a culture of research to permeate through our universities. In particular, the NRF shall provide a reliable base of merit-based and equitable peer-reviewed research funding, helping to develop a culture of research in the country through suitable incentives for and recognition of outstanding research, and by undertaking major initiatives to seed and grow research at State Universities and other public institutions where research capability is currently limited and to competitively fund research in all disciplines. Successful research shall be recognized, and where relevant, implemented through close linkages with governmental agencies as well as with industry, private and philanthropic organizations. Institutions that currently fund research at some level, such as the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Department of Bio-Technology (DBT), Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), and University Grants Commission (UGC), as well as various private and philanthropic organizations shall continue to independently fund research according to their priorities and needs. However, NRF shall carefully coordinate with other funding agencies and shall work with science, engineering, and other academies to ensure synergy of purpose and avoid duplication of efforts. The NRF shall be governed, independently of the government, by a rotating Board of Governors consisting of the very best researchers and innovators across fields. The primary activities of the NRF shall be to:

- a. Fund competitive, peer-reviewed grant proposals of all types and across all disciplines.
- b. Initiate and facilitate research at academic institutions, particularly at universities and colleges where research is currently in early stages through mentoring.
- c. Act as a bridge between researchers and relevant branches of government as well as industry, so that research scholars are constantly made aware of the most urgent national research issues, and so the policymakers being constantly made aware of the latest research breakthroughs to allow for optimal policy making and implementation.
- d. Give due recognition to outstanding research and progress.

Conclusions:

Implementation of the spirit and intent of the Policy will be the most critical matter. It is important to implement the policy initiatives in a phased manner, as each policy point has several steps, each of which requires the previous step to be implemented successfully. Prioritization will be important in ensuring optimal sequencing of policy points, and that the most critical and urgent actions are taken up first, thereby enabling

a strong base. In addition to this, comprehensiveness in implementation will be key because it is interconnected and holistic and only a full-fledged implementation will ensure that the desired objectives are achieved. Moreover, education is a concurrent subject, it will need careful planning, joint monitoring, and collaborative implementation between the Centre and States. Also, timely infusion of requisite resources: human, infrastructural, and financial from the Centre and State will be crucial for the satisfactory execution of the Policy. Finally, careful analysis and review of the linkages between multiple parallel implementation steps will be necessary to ensure effective integration of all initiatives. The quality framework recommended will by NEP 2020 will lead educational reforms in the country with emphasis on skill education for skill development. This will eventually help in removing and solving the problems of employment after education. Also, this will help in providing human resources to the industry according to their needs. The young skilled will be qualified enabling them to get employment and companies will get workers according to their needs. In this way, it will act as a bridge between the two and will be beneficial for both. For intellectual, social, and economic progress of a nation and the enhanced well-being of its citizens, the continuous creation and acquisition of new knowledge is necessary for which NRF will aim to become a major driver of that process for India, helping to sustainably thrust forward the nation's economy, enhance its security, promote well-being and societal progress, and grow India's position as a global leader.

References:

1. Kumar, A., & Singh, S. (2020). Review of National Education Policy 2020, with specific reference to higher education.
2. Singh, S., & Kumar, A. (2022). The impact of NEP 2020 on higher education in India: A comparative analysis
3. Draft National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2022), University Grants Commission, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
4. National Education Report (2020), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.
5. National Research Foundation – in pursuit of science – gets its wings | India Science, Technology & Innovation - ISTI Portal (indiascienceandtechnology.gov.in)
6. NHEQF: What is the National Framework, through which the government will frame skill education, how will unemployment be removed? (newsncr.com)
7. NHEQF: National Higher Education Qualifications Framework Draft | NEP 2020
8. (iitms.co.in)
9. Press Information Bureau. (2021). National Education Policy, 2020.
10. University Grants Commission. (2021). Salient features of NEP 2020: Higher education
11. University Grants Commission. (2021). Guidelines for innovative pedagogical approaches & evaluation reforms
12. UGC NHEQF Framework 2022 Based on NEP 2020: Commission Released Draft on
13. National Higher Education Qualification Framework (jagranjosh.com)