

# National Education Policy, 2020 and Appointment of Teachers through UGC-NET-the Policy Paradox

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## ABSTRACT

In a recent notification in July (UGC, 5<sup>th</sup> July ) 2023, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has once again acknowledged the vitality of the National Eligibility Test (NET), State Level Eligibility Test (SLET) and State Eligibility Test (SET) as minimum criteria for appointment of teachers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) whereas Ph.D. will remain an optional criterion. This notification once again revived the debates of NET or an accredited test (SLET/SET) and/or Ph.D. and embarked scholars to read the underlying causes of such frequently changing policies of UGC and overall ramifications of these on recruitment in the HEIs. In the context of implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, role of the HEIs for ensuring quality education has focused [1]. However, how these can be achieved through a dichotomous policy of NET/SLET/SET or PhD in the matters of selection of teachers. When many universities and colleges are run with inadequate teachers, in what ways they can fulfil the goal of NEP, 2020? How NET or an accredited test can be an important criterion for strengthening research programmers in HEIs? This paper critically evaluates these issues and presents the prolong issue of teachers' recruitment and role of HEIs in India for quality education through teachers in the context of NEP. It brings light to how contradictory policies are embedded and in operational in the form of UGC-NET and other similar tests for limiting HEIs despite implementation of NEP, 2020.

## Introduction

The rise of NEP 2020 in many ways visualizes as a game changer in higher education though its actual implication neither documented nor demonstrated. However, the implementation of the NEP 2020 has been heralded a new era in education policies in India. This is not the first occasion when India has implemented a national education policy, but previously in 1968 and in 1986 two national education policies were implemented through deliberating the deepening crisis of higher education. Since the 1968 when the first national education policy was formulated, a number of committees have formed to improve the quality of higher education. The NEP,2020 in some way different than the previous two policies since it is widely emphasized on the quality of higher education and strategies need to achieve those qualities through recruiting talented and dynamic teachers.

In the introductory part of the NEP, it acknowledges the role of education for developing an equitable and just society and promoting national development. At the same time, it has underlined the importance of education for economic growth,

social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration and cultural preservation. Part II of the NEP talks about the Higher Education in India. A key feature of the NEP vis-à-vis higher education is that it emphasizes holistic and multidisciplinary liberal education approach in higher education system to meet the demands of the job market and the challenges of the 21st century. It emphasizes on the development of the creative potential of each individual. After 34 years of the implementation of the second education policy, the NEP which came into 2020 talks about promoting new age and liberal education, though some scholars have apprehended that the NEP may lead into centralization of education system in India.

However, if one can see the quality of higher education in India, this is in the era of decline in many fronts. Continuous decline of educational standards in Indian universities and colleges, who are once upon a time were described by then education minister of India, Dr. S. Nurul Hasan as flickering lamps on a dark sea, has been questioned quality of higher education institutions [2]. This has further come through an ideological discourse between

state-centric reforms and their rivals who advocated “opening up” the higher education system for private initiative [2]. In the recent years, a new discourse emerged in the quality of HEIs in India, that is recruitment of teachers and minimum eligibility criteria required for those teachers. Much added to this debate is the standard set by the UGC for recruitment of teachers in the universities and in the colleges.

While on the one hand, the government of India has claimed the credit of implementation of a popular policy called the NEP, 2020, on the other hand the policies of the UGC in recruitment of teachers in the universities and in the colleges through UGC-NET continuing as a diktat. This has been a paradox which not only challenging vitality of the NEP but also creating a precarious scenario in recruitment. The NEP which was approved by the Union Cabinet on 29th July, 2020 outlines the vision of new education system through improving quality of universities and colleges [1]. It is a comprehensive framework that outlines reform in elementary to higher education as well as vocational training in both rural and urban India. However, role of UGC still in many ways playing a dominant role in the very entry level of quality education, that is recruitment of teachers.

This article looks at the NEP, 2020 from the UGC and NET/SLET/SET perspective and focuses on few important issues underlying with the higher education system in India. These are (i) adequacy and inadequacy of resources including human resources for NEP implementation, (ii) continuation of UGC and implementation UGC-NET and similar tests for recruitment of teachers, (iii) UGC-NET and PhD dichotomy and their contestations in the context of NEP and (iv) making higher education multidisciplinary through NEP and the challenges associated with this through UGC-NET. These issues are significant to re-imagining the role teachers in the HEIs in the backdrop of the NEP and continuation of UGC-NET and similar tests as main criteria for determining who can and can't be teachers. The interactions between UGC-NET and NEP for strengthening teaching and research HEIs need to be understood in current scenario as there has been a rising claim by the ruling classes about effectiveness of NEP, 2020.

### **The NEP and Higher Education Institutions**

The NEP was implemented in the context of strengthening education system and making education system effective in India. However, as it is observed by some scholars the contextual meaning contradicts the literal meanings of word used, in the sense that some key features of the NEP related to higher education institutions not clearly situated with the ground reality [3]. The advocates of holistic and multidisciplinary induced higher education system seem to be attempted to give the higher education system and institutions into a new shape but missed some opportunities to make it teachers friendly and quality based. The NEP emphasizes a vision for quality universities and colleges for making the education system holistic and multidisciplinary [1]. The policy aims to create student friendly learning environments. It also emphasizes to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities and colleges. It aims to merge the University Affiliated Colleges (UACs) in the form of large HEIs.

However, end of fragmentation of higher education may not be achieved only through large multidisciplinary educational institutions but effective integration of diversified ideas and practices that falls under various disciplines which is otherwise known as interdisciplinary approach. An interdisciplinary education system has three key approaches-contextualizing, conceptualizing and problem-centric which take place in a class room teaching [4]. Further universities and colleges require adequate number of teachers who can work as vibrant forces for making education system holistic, multidisciplinary and diversified. Who will ensure the adequacy and quality of teachers and on what parameters, the teachers will be appointed? Still the UGC guidelines are under implementation when the idea of motivated, energized and capable faculties underlined is the NEP [1]. UGC continues as an important organization on various matters inter alia determining the criteria for teachers' appointment. The transformation of regulatory system in higher education system through the organization of a Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) has been a distanced reality after three years in implementation of the NEP.

### **NEP, Human Resources and the Role of Teachers in Higher Education Institutions**

The NEP talks about role of teachers in Universities and Colleges from a multidimensional perspective. Preparing teachers for imparting quality education based on knowledge and practice are two important dimensions. At the same time, it has been talked about the practice of ‘selling degrees’ and protecting universities and colleges from degree selling spree. It is important to learn that how a new education policy would successfully able to address this practice strategically. Since ‘selling of degrees’ is not a new phenomenon and in recent years, selling of degrees through liberalization approach has been multiplied in India. Perceived preferences for Foreign Degrees added a new chapter in the ‘degree selling and purchasing trade’ and rapidly increased as a dominant trend in Indian Teaching spectrum. Be it is a degree from any reputed university or it is a degree from any other universities, treated as equal in the matters of recruitment in the HEIs. This in many ways undermined the actual aim of NEP in the matters of teachers for the HEIs.

The role of teachers as an important component of the higher education system largely missing from various aspects of NEP implementation pathways except teaching and research. Merely outlining their role in policy document and disallowing to engage in larger counters of NEP implementation appears to be a mockery for re designing HEIs. This is also against the spirit maintaining quality in these institutions. Some scholars have noted that there has been a continuous decline in faculty motivation levels in recent years, which can be seen from a NEP and UGC perspectives [5]. Still, the policy continues with the unscientific Performance Based Appraisal System (PBAS), initiated under the 2010 Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) of the UGC. The Academic Performance Indicators (API) which were discontinued after the release of UGC Regulations 2018 have not been reinstated. While in NEP, there is greater emphasis on encouraging motivated and energized teachers, at the UGC level there has been a reversed policy, demotivate and discourage young and dynamic people to work as teachers through various ways.

### NET and Recruitment of Teachers

The National Eligibility Test popularly known as UGC-NET among its practitioners has emerged as a main criterion for the appointment of teachers in universities and colleges. UGC-NET is a test to determine the eligibility of the Indian Nationals for 'Assistant Professor' in Indian universities and colleges. Until July 2018, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) conducted the UGC-NET examination, which is now being conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) since December 2018. However, the paradox exists in NET is while some brightest students, many of them are engaged in cutting-edge research, find it extremely difficult to cross this hurdle, on the other hand there are some students qualified this examination without adequate understanding about their subject [5]. There is hardly any subjective or qualitative assessment available through which one can claim the merits and vitality of the UGC-NET for enhancing quality of teaching, research and education standards. As per some scholars, the conduct of UGC-NET and its importance for selection of teachers in actual case damaging the standard of higher education [5]. Disallowing a large number of motivated and brightest students for appointment of teachers actually contradicting the significance of the NEP. There is no mention of importance of UGC-NET or similar accreditation (SLET/SET) in NEP and any reference made about the future of NET after the end of UGC [6]. Can Recruitment of Teachers through NET make Higher Education holistic and multidisciplinary?

#### Quality Education in Universities and Colleges: NET or PhD?

The debates between UGC-NET and PhD as qualifying or eligibility criteria for appointment of Teachers in HEIs remain despite the implementation of NEP, 2020. While NEP has underlined the importance of motivated and energized teachers in the higher education institutions, at the same time not created much avenue for the Ph.D. degree holders to be associated with the education system as teachers. At the same time, there is no clarity about NET or similar kind of tests. It is a paradox since UGC-NET continues to hold its importance after the implementation of NEP and Ph.D. remains a non-essential or optional criterion. However, how UGC-NET is important for quality higher education and why Ph.D. which is a research-based degree, continue to be regarded as an optional or secondary criteria? When on the one hand there are efforts to strengthen the education system and standards through research, on the other hand undermining Ph.D. degree can be seen as a sinister move to undermine the research programmes in the HEIs.

### In Conclusions-After Three Years of NEP

The concept of quality, inclusivity and multidisciplinary education through NEP not entirely gives strength of higher education rather breached loopholes in making higher education system effective. Conventional and contentious issues like teachers' recruitment and interference of UGC through regulations and prevalence of UGC-NET as a dominant trend in determining eligibility criteria have made the system more complicated rather than enabling HEIs to attract next generation students to become teachers. While on the one hand there is a decline of teaching and research quality in universities and

colleges due to shortage of teachers and researchers, on the other hand contradictory policies further enhance the problem. It shows that our policy makers not willing to learn any lesson from their past mistakes (weak implementation of previous two education policies) and continuing same in the context of NEP, 2020. This scenario tends to believe that higher education system through NEP may not achieve important objectives as long as UGC led policies will continue and policy like UGC-NET continue to determine our system of appointing teachers in the higher education institutions. Strengthening research programme will remain in as a policy document with absence of Ph.D. qualified teachers and researchers.

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