



THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: NEP IMPLEMENTATION AND COLLEGE MERGER

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Abstract

This paper provides a complete overview to readers about the topic of Merger of Universities under the NEP 2022. Main focus of this paper has been on how the New Education Policy will change institutions and how to adjust this change and use this guidelines to determine which eligibility colleges or institutions a school or institution wants. The following points provide information about and support for an institution's decision to offer merger options. Will institutions be able to compete with larger universities and institutions by customizing NEP to their own needs? Some college data were used in this paper for primary study and problem analysis. This paper also discussed the issues that the institution will be facing, and it have some solutions for these issues. The issues are related to the integration of ICT tools and mainstream education, language barriers, enrolment rates of rural university students, lack of university resources, unavailability of electricity and infrastructure facilities in rural educational institutions, etc.

The National Education Plan 2020 (NEP 2020) introduced the concept of multidisciplinary programmes. The NEP makes it mandatory for college institutions to combine Vocational education with their regular college courses. This Vocational education is no longer an option for students who drop out in 12th grade. New education policy makes it compulsory for all students. Institutions must now combine their regular courses with Vocational education policy. In this paper, we explore on How institution not be able to concentrate on both the core courses and will merger option would be best for colleges to consider?

Keywords: NEP (New Education policy 2020), Vocational Education, Merger & Acquisition.

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Introduction:

The introduction of the National Education Policy of 2020 has brought along changes to fundamentals of the education sector. With the prescription of a rampant updating of curriculum and expansion of the subject matter across all disciplines, the policy intends to close the chasm between the program and course outcomes, and the industry requirements.

To succeed in this undertaking, material attention is

paid to the inclusion of ICT in not only the teaching-learning methods, but also as core competencies developed in the learners within the courses. Thus, for nurturing practical applications of the subject material, ICT tools are being included in the framing of the course outcomes.

While the decision is beneficial, and has been framed with well-intentioned goals, the practical execution of the suggested policy has experienced a mixed reception

across the different colleges gearing up for the change. This paper shall attempt to explore one of the aspects of the challenges being held up by such ICT requirements by colleges, and shall attempt to suggest a solution for the same in the form of mergers and or developing an extension of the sharing economy. Due to limitations of the authors, the research shall restrict itself mostly to the colleges belonging to Mumbai University.

Research methodology:

This study found some difficulties the institution would face in implementing NEP 2020 and identified potential areas for merger. It also attempted to give comprehensive details regarding the institution's problems along with potential solutions. A small amount of primary and secondary data supports the study.

Regional Disparities:

While the curricula is held common across colleges belonging under the umbrella of the Mumbai University, it is necessary to understand the differentials in resources, of both students and institutions, that exist across the university. The Mumbai University spans a number of districts in Mumbai and its suburbs, with the number of affiliated colleges being higher than 800. With such a rich expanse of institutions, spread across such a wide geographical range, it can be extrapolated without many assumptions that the affiliates as well as their student bodies belong to backgrounds that are highly heterogeneous in various socioeconomic aspects. The dimensions of this diversity can be observed on the basis of income levels of students, funds available to colleges, lingual variations and capabilities of the students, lingual capacity of the educators, access to technology, familial support in educational endeavours and so on.

The presence of a common curriculum at the university level, permits the maintenance of a quality assurance of

the courses and programs provided, but does not comment reliably on the actual outcomes generated. The curriculum serves the need for providing a common standing ground for students of all backgrounds, in providing equity in the opportunities for employment and career. However, it also remains as a challenging demand for the institutions to arrange for the same infrastructure across institutions.

Such a challenge remains inevitable as the institutions cater to a student body composed of varying socioeconomic groups, with the majority being composed differently depending on the geographical area. These regional variations may result in differences in the fees collected by the colleges, which sets its budgetary limit in the long run. The number of admissions also varies, notwithstanding the quality of the education imparted, based on the demographic features of the region of operations.

Both these factors dictate the level of investment made into infrastructure and staff of the institution. While these differences exist in infrastructure and staff body, those were the result of the requirements circumstantial to those specific institutions. However, the introduction of NEP 2020, and the mandate for upgradation has broken this status quo. It is agreeably a necessity, but the process of change hints towards a period of chaos.

Transformations Expected:

The NEP 2020 presented the idea of multidisciplinary courses. Under this policy, the student would no longer be limited to a singular discipline, like Science, Commerce or Humanities, as was the case in the previous system. This is in acknowledgement to the requisite industrial skills being distributed across disciplines, shifting a unilateral focus on technical skills to a more holistic approach towards comprehensive development. This would allow the students to acquire a more diverse set of skills, which would help with flexibility in their employable roles. However, this also places a burden on the institutions

in providing a range of subjects beyond their primary focus, or risk losing a portion of their student body.

Many colleges affiliated to Mumbai University are specialised colleges, focusing on commerce or law or medicine. These colleges would face the risk of losing their competitive edge or expanding to sectors of which they possess minimal exposure. One solution available to this predicament would be by the institution merging its present competitive advantage with another institution of a distinct field. Such mergers would allow both colleges to maintain their independent identities while allowing the students to benefit from their individual as well as shared competencies.

The syllabus of Masters of Arts of Economics has been adapted to fit the requirements of NEP from the academic year 2024-25. This adaptation witnessed the inclusion of Computer Applications as a subject in their first semester. The course is aimed at covering the technical basics of MS Excel and provide students with a practical understanding of financial functions. However, a twofold problem is faced in this regard.

First is the limit on the IT infrastructure available to the colleges. As colleges providing Masters of Arts in Economics in affiliation with the Mumbai University are limited in number, each of the colleges do cater to a high number of students. Due to the scarcity of such colleges, especially in areas ranging from Bhayander to Virar, there exist only a handful of colleges that admit most of the local students. While the number of admissions are high, the college may not have provided as much investment towards computer labs, which were previously centred solely around the Science discipline. This would result in many of the smaller colleges being unable to provide a proper teaching learning experience to the students of computers, which has an adverse computers-to-student ratio. The same issue also persists from the students' side, with many students even in moderately developed areas having no access to computers outside of their colleges. While the

case of MA Economics was taken as a specific case in point, it is far from being the only program presenting this issue.

Most of the smaller colleges that cater to the rural population do not have access to a well-endowed computer laboratory or other ICT infrastructure. Abhinav College of Science, Arts and Commerce; Sonopant Dandekar College, and SND College all face this issue.

The students are less in number and the fees charged are also nominal. While some government funds may be provided in expansion of this infrastructure, its maintenance and upkeep may not be sustainable solely on the fees collected. These colleges may have to merge with larger institutions to be able to keep up with the demands of NEP. They may also enter agreements with other institutions for sharing of the infrastructural facilities at a more affordable cost.

The second challenge is the lingual barrier arising from this. The medium of teaching-learning for most, if not all, Science courses was predominantly in English; while the Humanities courses did allow the students to avail of multiple media, including English, Hindi and Marathi. The interdisciplinary approach being propagated will clash with these lingual barriers. For lesser developed areas, the students of Humanities do not possess adequate proficiency in English to be able to fully benefit from the multidisciplinary facilities. While NEP does suggest the opening up of all courses in all regional languages, the practicality of the suggestion is put into question by the lingual capabilities of the existing teachers.

This would also require the institutions to either hire more teachers from a more diverse background, or to invest into training programs for the existing teachers to adapt to the changing requirements. Both would entail rising costs for the college. On the other hand, if the existing teachers are replaced to a limited degree by others, it would still continue to present the issue of a

sudden massive wave of unemployment in the education sector. Using Contracts for Hourly Basis hires would worsen the financial condition of the teachers so hired.

While the larger colleges would be able to bear through this attrition and continue, the same luxury of funds may not be available for the smaller institutions.

Conclusion:

Thus, as the new developments of the NEP are being rolled into implementation in line with the industrial needs, the colleges are faced with challenges of adaptation. While the well-endowed colleges are capable of meeting the changing requirements, the same cannot be claimed for smaller colleges scattered across the lesser developed regions.

The paper analysed the condition of the colleges in Mumbai city and suburbs, from their recent Annual Quality Assurance Reports (AQARs), and shall proceed to recommend the incapable colleges of either opting for mergers or framing a joint sharing setup for the requisite resources with other institutions. While a more robust plan would be an inevitable necessity in the long run, such provisions should allow the institutions to conform to the UGC guidelines in the short term.

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