

# NEP 2020 and Features of Higher Education: Focuses on Fostering Critical Thinking Skill

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**Abstract**—The NEP (National Education Policy) 2020 marks an important shift in the Indian Education system, specifically in higher education. One of the primaries aims and objectives NEP-2020 are to transfer away from rote memorization toward the development of higher order cognitive skills, especially Critical Thinking. In the context of quick technological advancement, complex societal challenges and a knowledge driven global economy, critical thinking has emerged as a necessary competency for higher education. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, critical thinking is mandatory for decision making, problem solving, innovation and responsible citizenship.

This seminar paper examines the vision of NEP-2020 with particular reference to higher education and its role in fostering critical thinking skills students. The paper analyses main policy provisions such as multidisciplinary and holistic education, flexible curriculum structures, multiple entry and exit options, experiential and inquiry-based learning, competency-based assessment and the progression of research and innovation.

The concludes by asserting that effective application of NEP-2020 in higher education has the potential to significantly enhance critical thinking skill. This paper also highlights on NEP 2020 and features Higher Education: Focuses on Fostering Critical Thinking Skill.

**Index Terms**—NEP 2020, Higher Education, Critical Thinking.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NEP 2020 (National Education Policy 2020) is Indian's first policy of education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and replaces the previous policy from 1986. It aims and objectives to transfer of education system by fostering student centred learning, flexibility and multidisciplinary that develops not only knowledge

but higher order cognitive skills such as creativity, problem solving and critical thinking

Critical thinking is main aims of National Education Policy 2020 as it moves away from memorization towards inquiry based learning and experiential learning. Higher Education specially colleges and universities plays a central role of shaping learners thinking capacities, making this a fundamental area of policy focus.

This paper examines how NEP 2020 envisions higher education as a platform for nurturing critical thinking skills.

### Concept of Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking refers to the capability to think clearly, logically and independently. It involves analysing information, evaluating arguments, identifying biases and making decision. Main elements of Critical Thinking include logical reasoning, problem-solving, decision making and reflection and self-evaluation. In higher education critical thinking empowers students to go beyond surface learning and engage deeply with knowledge. It is basically for academic success, professional competence and lifelong learning.

### Overview of NEP 2020 in Higher Education

NEP 2020 imagines a holistic development, flexibility and multidisciplinary of Higher Education system integrated with global standards while rooted in Indian values.

The NEP 2020 focuses on flexibility in curriculum, learner centered education, multidisciplinary and holistic learning, skills development and employability, research and innovation, and creativity. The fundamental goal is to develop

individuals with critical thinking, ethical reasoning, creativity and problem-solving ability.

## II. KEY FEATURES OF NEP 2020 THAT FOCUSES ON FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING

- Multidisciplinary and Holistic approach of Education:

The NEP 2020 change inflexible boundaries between arts, commers, science and vocational subjects. Students are foster to study diverse disciplines, which broadens perspectives and promotes analytical thinking.

✓ Impact on Critical Thinking

- a) Encourages integration of knowledge.
- b) Develops ability to view problem from multiple perspectives.
- c) Enhances creativity and intellectual curiosity.

- Experiential learning and Inquiry based learning: The NEP 2020 highly emphasizes experiential learning and inquiry-based learning, including internships, fieldwork, case studies, projects and research-based learning.

✓ Impact on Critical Thinking

- a) Improve problem solving abilities.
- b) Connects theory with real life situation.
- c) Inspires questioning, exploring and innovation.

- Academic and Administrative autonomy:

The NEP 2020 encourages academic and administrative autonomy for Higher Education institutions, encouraging innovation in teaching and curriculum design.

✓ Impact on Critical Thinking

- a) Possible adaptation of innovative pedagogies.
- b) Inspires discussion, debate and reflective learning.
- c) Makes an intellectually stimulating environment.

- Flexible Curriculum and Multiple Entry-Exit System:

The introduction of the multiple entry and exit system allows students to design their learning pathways based on interests and abilities.

✓ Impact on Critical Thinking

- a) Promotes self-directed learning.

- b) Encourages reflection and informed decision-making.
- c) Reduces pressure and fosters meaningful engagement with subjects.

- Competency based and formative assessments: Traditional exams are being exchanged with competency based and formative assessments that evaluate understanding, application and analysis rather than memorization.

✓ Impact on Critical Thinking

- a) Inspires deep learning.
- b) Assesses reasoning and analytical skill.
- c) Minimize rote learning practices.

## III. ROLE OF THE TEACHERS IN FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING

Teachers play an important role in applying the NEP 2020. Their role shifts from information providers to facilitators of learning. Teachers are expected to...

- Creating an Inquiry Based Learning Environment.
- Adopt discussion, debate, project-based learning and problem-based learning.
- Facilitate collaborative activities that require analysis and reasoning.
- Design the tasks that involve analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creativity.
- Use real-life problems, Case Studies and open-ended questions.
- Use digital tools, simulations and research activities to enhance analysis.
- Use formative assessments, portfolios, presentations and reflective journals.
- Help students reflect on mistakes and improve thinking strategies.
- Focus feedback on reasoning and process, not just correct answers.

## IV. CHALLENGES IN FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING

- Resistance to change:

Traditional rote learning mindsets among educators and institutions. Schools and colleges may lack autonomy or resources to implement innovative practices.

- Examination oriented learning:

Continued dominance of rote memorization and high stakes exams. Limited assessment of higher order thinking skills.

▪ Classroom Barriers:

Large class sizes restrict interactive teaching and personalized feedback. Limited scope for debates, projects and collaborative learning.

▪ Lack of Teachers Training:

Many teachers lack training in inquiry based, discussion driven and experiential pedagogy. Teacher may lack confidence in facilitating open ended discussions.

▪ Assessment reforms lag:

Despite NEP 2020 recommendation, competency-based assessments are slow to be implemented.

▪ Language and Communication Barriers:

Multilingual classrooms and early transition to English can hinder expression and reasoning. Difficulty in articulating ideas, especially in second language learning environments.

▪ Fear of failure and Questioning:

Students hesitate to express ideas due to fear of being wrong. Cultural norms may discourage questioning authority.

## V. SUGGESTION FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

To fully realize NEP 2020 vision institutions must adopt specific strategies.

▪ Interactive Teaching Methods:

Use of case studies, problem-based learning and collaborative learning for interactive teaching.

▪ Assessment Reforms:

Use rubrics that measure analytical and evaluative skills. Use Continuous formative assessments rather than one-time exams.

▪ Faculty Development programs:

Workshops on critical pedagogy, inquiry-based instruction and assessment design. Encourage peer observation and feedback culture among teachers.

▪ Student support system:

- Mentoring and guidance for research projects.
- Clubs and activities that promote debates, discussions and writing.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The NEP 2020 noted that Higher Education must go beyond textbook knowledge and cultivate critical thinking as a core competency. Through flexible curriculum, multidisciplinary learning, competency-based assessments and teacher development, NEP 2020 provides a roadmap to transform Indian higher education. However, understanding this vision requires strong institutional commitment, persistent implementation efforts and cultural adaptations toward learner centered education.

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