Mains Practice Question

Q. Higher education reforms in India are crucial for fostering social mobility and equity. Evaluate the role of National Education Policy 2020 in ensuring accessibility and quality in higher education. **(250 words)**

04 Mar, 2025   GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the status of Higher Education System in India
- Highlight the Role of NEP 2020 in Ensuring Accessibility and Quality in Higher Education
- Delve into the Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 and suggest Measures for Strengthening Higher Education System:
- Conclude with a forward looking approach.

Introduction

India's higher education system has long grappled with challenges such as **low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), faculty shortages,** outdated curricula, and inadequate industry linkages.

- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** aims to address these issues by introducing structural reforms to enhance accessibility, quality, and equity in higher education.

Body

Role of NEP 2020 in Ensuring Accessibility in Higher Education:

- **Increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Inclusivity**
    - NEP 2020 targets an increase in **GER from 27.3% (AISHE 2023) to 50% by 2035,** ensuring wider access to higher education.
    - Emphasizes **gender parity** and inclusion of marginalized groups through scholarships and financial aid for SC/ST, OBCs, and economically weaker sections (EWS).
    - Expands **Open and Distance Learning (ODL)** and online education to cater to rural and working professionals.
- **Multiple Entry-Exit System and Academic Flexibility**
    - The introduction of **multiple entry-exit options** allows students to re-enter higher education without losing academic progress.
    - The **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** enables students to store and transfer credits across institutions, ensuring continuity in learning.
    - These reforms **prevent dropout wastage** and make higher education more accessible to working professionals and disadvantaged students.
- **Digital Learning and EdTech Integration**
    - NEP 2020 promotes **digital education** through platforms like **SWAYAM, DIKSHA, and PM eVidya,** offering **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).**
    - Encourages **hybrid learning models** by integrating online and offline teaching methods.
    - The Digital University concept aims to **bridge the digital divide** by providing high-quality

education to remote areas.

Role of NEP 2020 in Ensuring Quality in Higher Education:

- **Curriculum Reform and Multidisciplinary Approach**
  - NEP 2020 **replaces rigid discipline-based learning** with a **flexible, multidisciplinary approach.**
  - Encourages **four-year undergraduate programs** with **interdisciplinary specializations** and research components.
  - Promotes **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** by integrating subjects like yoga, Ayurveda, and philosophy with modern disciplines.
- **Strengthening Research and Innovation**
  - Establishment of the **National Research Foundation (NRF)** to improve India's research output and **increase R&D funding.**
  - Encourages **academia-industry collaboration** for applied research and innovation.
  - India's **Global Innovation Index ranking (40th in 2023)** can improve with enhanced research focus.
- **Improving Faculty Quality and Training**
  - The **Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNMTT)** enhances **teacher training and pedagogy.**
  - Addresses **faculty shortages** through reforms in recruitment and training, reducing vacancies in IITs, IIMs, and other institutions.
  - Promotes **faculty exchange programs** with international universities to enhance teaching quality.

Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020:

- **Faculty Shortages:** 40% vacancies in IITs and 31% in IIMs hinder teaching quality.
- **Low GER & Inequality**: Rural and marginalized communities still struggle with accessibility.
- **Research Funding Gap**: India's R&D spending at 0.7% of GDP falls short of the global 1.8% average.
- **Digital Divide:** Only 34% of schools have the internet, limiting online learning opportunities.
- I**ndustry-Academia Disconnect**: Outdated curricula contribute to a low employability rate of 54.81%.

Measures for Strengthening Higher Education System:

- **Strengthening Research and Innovation**
  - Increase R&D funding to **2% of GDP** and encourage **public-private partnerships** for research development.
  - Establish **Research & Innovation Clusters** linking universities, industries, and government institutions.
- **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure**
  - Expand broadband connectivity and **5G-powered virtual learning** to bridge the **digital divide** in rural areas.
  - Equip universities with **AI-driven learning tools** and digital classrooms.
- **Improving Faculty Recruitment and Training**
  - Offer **competitive salaries** and research grants to attract global faculty talent.
    Link **SWAYAM** with **faculty development programs** for continuous learning.
- **Strengthening Industry-Academia Collaboration**
  - Establish **Centers of Excellence (CoEs)** in universities for industry-relevant skill training.
  - Implement **internships and apprenticeships** as mandatory degree components.
- **Expanding International Collaborations**
  - Promote **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** globally through cultural education programs.
  - Encourage more **Indian universities to set up global campuses,** following IIT Madras' Zanzibar model.

Conclusion

The **National Education Policy 2020** is a landmark reform aimed at making India's higher education **accessible, inclusive, and globally competitive**. By introducing **multidisciplinary learning, digital education, research funding, and regulatory simplifications**, NEP 2020 lays the foundation for a **future-ready education system.**

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