



What's new in higher education

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(Mains GS 2 : Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources)

Context:

- Delhi University has approved a four-year undergraduate course from next year as part of the new National Education Policy.
- The New Education Policy (NEP) proposes several reforms for higher education and if implemented in letter and spirit, the NEP can change the classroom experience.

Multidisciplinary nature:

- Higher education in India is focused on producing disciplinary experts but the new NEP proposes to break disciplinary boundaries.
- For example, a B.Tech student would no longer limit themselves to their engineering branch.
- Instead, their programmes will have a more significant component of arts and humanities.
- Students of arts and humanities will aim to learn more science, and all will make an effort to incorporate more vocational subjects and soft skills.

The LASE programme:

- IIT-Bombay's new Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (LASE) Programme is one example of how the NEP's vision translates on ground.
- The LASE programme gives students the option to graduate with a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in five fields or "concentrations" — engineering sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, art and design.

- The fifth option permits the student to design her own concentration.
- LASE students will study a set of foundation courses in their second year such as modern South Asian history, history of science, contemporary digital societies, current social structures, reading and writing literature, in addition to their STEM courses.

4-year undergraduate programme:

- While multidisciplinary is the final destination, the four-year undergraduate programme suggested in the NEP document is a means to that end.
- Undergraduate programmes in India, except professional degrees such as B Tech and MBBS, usually last three years.
- The new policy proposes to “adjust” the length of degree programmes to allow students “to experience the full range of holistic and multidisciplinary education in addition to a focus on the chosen major and minors as per the choices of the student”.
- While the NEP doesn’t call for scrapping of the three-year format, it states that the four-year multidisciplinary Bachelor’s programme “shall be the preferred option”.

The programme:

- While students pursuing undergraduate education will be studying an extra year, they will also have the option to leave before that with “appropriate certification”.
- Quitting after the first year will earn you a certificate, after the second year a diploma, and after the third a Bachelor’s degree.
- Completing the entire programme would lead to a bachelor’s degree “with Research” if the student completes “a rigorous research project” in her major area(s) of study.
- Delhi University is the first higher education institution to implement this NEP suggestion.

Academic Bank of Credit:

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) had introduced a choice-based credit system (CBCS) before the NEP.
- Under this system, students earn credits for each course he/she takes during their degree studies.
- The Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) proposed by the NEP is where higher education institutions will digitally deposit credits earned by students for courses they studied.

Effect on the classroom experience:

- On ground, the ABC is expected to aid the multiple entry and exit system as well as multidisciplinary in higher education.
- In other words, a student’s deposit of credits in the ABC should help her move laterally from one higher education institution to another, if needed.

- Designating credits to each course would also mean that courses or projects in areas such as community engagement and service, environmental education, sciences, mathematics, art, sports and value-based education would carry weight.
- This, according to the NEP, would go a long way in “attainment of a holistic and multidisciplinary education”.

Regional languages

- The new education policy lays emphasis on promoting Indian languages, arts and culture through education.
- One of the ways it proposes to do so is by getting higher education institutions to adopt regional languages or the local tongue as the medium of instruction in the classroom.
- To begin with, the government has allowed 14 engineering colleges to teach selected engineering programmes in five languages: Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, Telugu and Hindi.
- This will help increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education as students who are not proficient in English will be encouraged to pursue further studies in regional languages.

National Entrance Test:

- Another proposal that could change the higher education experience of students is a single university entrance exam conducted by the National Testing Agency.
- If this is implemented, students will not have to appear for multiple entrance tests.
- The high quality, range, and flexibility of the NTA testing services will enable most universities to use these common entrance exams rather than having hundreds of universities each devising their own entrance exams.
- This will drastically reduce the burden on students, universities and colleges, and the entire education system.

Conclusion:

- New Education Policy opens the gate for multidisciplinary programmes along with multiple entry and exit for the students in higher education.
- This ensures higher gross enrolment and better education assimilation which leads to overall development of students.