



EDITORIAL

New National Education Policy 2024 and Healthcare Skill Development

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Accepted: 07-September-2024 / Published Online: 08-September-2024

Embracing Opportunities

India's education system has significantly transformed by introducing the new National Education Policy (NEP) 2024. The policy, approved by the Union Cabinet of India, aims to empower students with high-quality education and job-centric skills. The NEP 2024 is on the evolution of the national education policy introduced in 2020 by Prime Minister Modi. This policy aims to propel India towards becoming a thriving knowledge-based society and a global leader in knowledge. Among its key objectives are enhancing the quality of education, promoting holistic learning, ensuring equitable access, and fostering innovation and research. By prioritising continuous improvement and a focus on holistic development, NEP is well-positioned to create a brighter future for India and its people.

The following are the aspects of higher education, with special emphasis on professional education as related to healthcare education.

The NEP articulates a broad view of education encompassing the holistic development of youth, with special emphasis on kindling the creative potential of each individual in all its richness and complexity. It aims to develop 21st-century skills in students while also giving them enough flexibility in making choices.

Increasing population is a boon for Globalization. Over the next decade, India will have the world's highest population of young people, with more than 50% below the age of 35 aspiring for high-quality education. This demographic dividend must be taken advantage of by Globalization, and the demands of a knowledge economy and knowledge society call for emphasis on the need for the acquisition of new skills by learners on a regular basis for them

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to 'learn how to learn' and become lifelong learners, a critical consideration that needs to be addressed appropriately.

The vision of India's new educational system has been crafted to ensure that it touches every citizen's life and is consistent with their needs and necessities, besides

creating a just and equitable society. The new education policy provides an integrated yet flexible approach to education. Further, it has kept the interconnectedness of the various phases of education in mind and how the same will enable continuity, coherence, and processes to ultimately realize an end-to-end educational roadmap for the country.

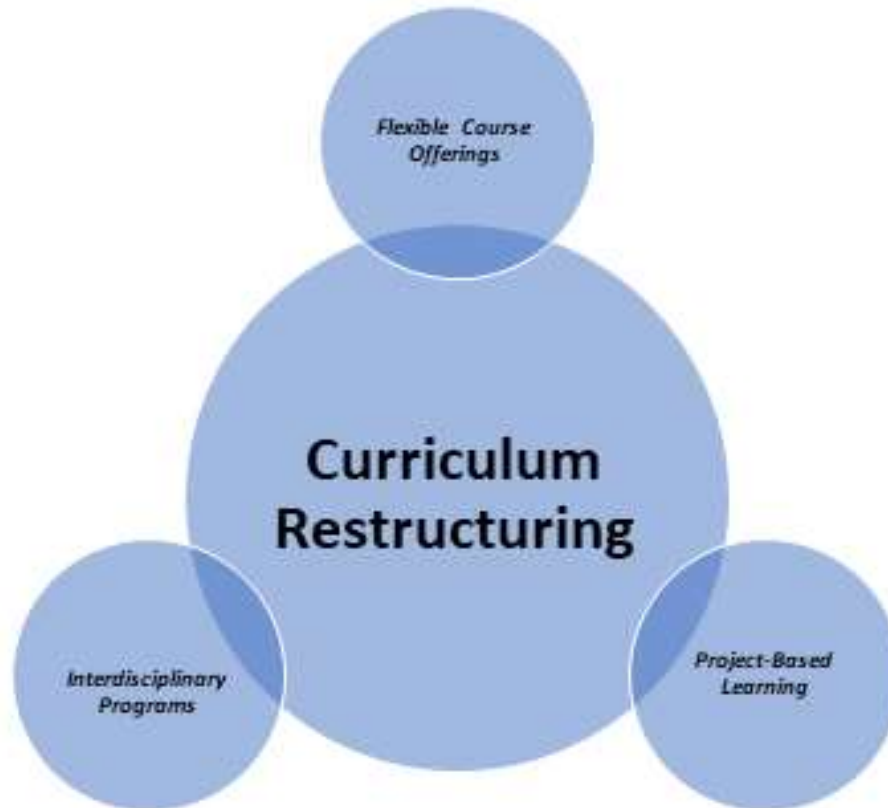


Figure 1. Curriculum restructuring

With respect to the health care manpower, there has been a considerable increase in the number of medical colleges, MBBS and PG seats in the last 10 years. As of July 2024, the following figures have been provided to the Lok Sabha by the Hon'ble Union MoS for Health Ms Anupriya Patel:

- 1,12,112 MBBS seats—in 731 Medical Colleges
- 72,267 PG seats

- 322 Government colleges with 48,012 seats &
- 290 Private Institutes with 43,915 seats.
- An increase from 51,348 MBBS seats and 31,185 PG seats

In the context of increasing the intake of students, the NHP recommendation is to upgrade the 600 or so district hospitals in the country to teaching hospitals at the earliest by investing in infrastructures for

targeted specialties and stationing adequately qualified teaching faculty.

Some of the specific recommendations from the policy are as follows:

- The first relates to ensuring the superior quality of an MBBS degree. The expectation that society has from a medical doctor is extremely high, more than any other profession. It is, therefore, imperative that all MBBS graduates possess (i) medical skills; (ii) diagnostic skills; (iii) surgical skills; and (iv) emergency skills. This should be ensured in the revamped education of medical students. Further, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and opportunity for gaining work experience during studies should all be improved (Figure 1). The compulsory rotation internship needs to be reintroduced and made more robust and effective.
- A second important recommendation relates to pluralistic healthcare

education and delivery. The suggestion here is to design the first year or two of the MBBS course as a common period for all science graduates, after which they can take up MBBS, BDS, Nursing, or other specializations. Core courses will follow common foundational courses based on medical pluralism focused on specific systems and electives that encourage bridging across systems. Another important aspect relates to the flexibility for the graduates from other medical disciplines such as nursing, dentistry, etc. being allowed lateral entry in to the MBBS course (Figure 2).

Given the pluralistic healthcare legacy of the country, the different health systems such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) will be mainstreamed.



Figure 2. Collaborative teaching and learning

- A third important recommendation of the policy relates to nursing education and the career progression of nurses. Quality (especially the curriculum) of nursing education will be improved and strengthened. Institutions providing nursing education will be accredited every five years. A national accreditation body for nursing education and other sub-streams needs to be created for the purpose. Nurse Practitioners courses will be introduced and recognized throughout India so that nurses can compensate in part for the non-availability of doctors.
- Professional education might represent a smaller segment of the overall educational system in India but has a huge impact, as follows:
 - Its influence on the economy and society is substantial.
 - The specialized skills and expertise it provides have far-reaching effects on innovation, economic development, and social progress.
 - The contexts in which professions are practiced are being redefined constantly by the changes in our understanding of society, the environment, human rights and ethics. At the same time, professions are also becoming highly differentiated and are constantly evolving as developments in science and technology gather pace. Professional undergraduate education must rise to this challenge.
- It means blending practical, job-oriented training with traditional academic learning.
- Adding relevant professional skills and industry knowledge into academic courses.
- Providing hands-on experiences
- Collaborating with businesses to offer insights
- Career planning, including resume writing and interview coaching.
- Communication and teamwork
- Regularly updating programs based on industry trends
- Overall, this reintegration helps students acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for successful careers.
- All higher educational institutions, including those offering professional education, will be empowered to widen the scope of their course offerings so that each of them becomes a large multidisciplinary institution offering a wide selection of courses. This is best achieved by making institutions offering professional education a part of the larger ecosystem of higher education instead of remaining isolated entities.
- **Advantages of a multidisciplinary-based approach**
 - The power of a multidisciplinary-based approach to realize an appropriate outcome is well illustrated by the example of the remarkably speedy development of effective vaccines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2020, the World Health Organization said that it did not expect a vaccine against SARS-

CoV-2 in less than 18 months. And just 13 months later, over 2 crore people were vaccinated in India alone. The successful development of these vaccines has been, thanks to the tireless efforts from experts across numerous disciplines—from **bioinformatics** for identifying the genetic sequences of this deadly virus to **computational biology** for identifying potentially efficacious vaccines, to **chemical engineering** to develop vaccines at sufficient scale for clinical trials, to actually **conducting** these vaccines.

- However, these experts have been able to work largely within their well-defined silos before “handing off” to experts from other disciplines at well-understood points in the overall vaccine development process. This is the hallmark of a “multi-disciplinary”-based approach.
- Innovation, in surveys of health care is generally ignored. India imported Rs. 41,000 crores worth of medical instruments (65%), medical devices (25%), implants (4%), consumables and disposables (6%) for the health care sector in 2020. Due to their high cost, their accessibility and affordability are, unfortunately, limited to 20% of our population, according to a study by the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- India has made a modest start in this direction by R&D and production in medical devices such as blood bags, heart valves, implantable lenses, etc. (Figure 3). What is less known is that technology and modern science have cast a spell on Ayurveda as well. The cumbersome and ancient methods of producing drugs in Ayurveda have been streamlined by large producers—whose number is rising—employing advances in process control and quality assurance.
- Equally importantly, a new branch of science—Ayurvedic Biology—is making progress in research at the molecular level based on cues from Ayurveda. This is a path that will take us to major discoveries and likely benefits to the practice of medicine.

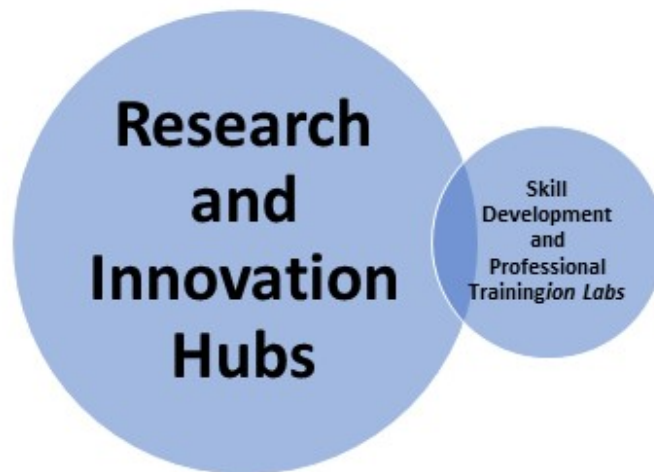


Figure 3. Research and innovation hubs

Innovation in health Care: By aligning with the principles of NEP 2024, healthcare education can become more dynamic, inclusive, and relevant, ultimately leading to a more skilled and adaptable healthcare workforce.

The Skill Development Programs will receive a boost as NEP advocates for skill development as a key component of the education system, promoting both technical and soft skills. This would support the development of specialized training programs in healthcare that align with industry needs and technological advancements. Integration of vocational training into mainstream education systems can lead to the inclusion of healthcare vocational training programs within schools and colleges, allowing students to

gain practical skills alongside their academic education. The NEP supports collaboration between educational institutions and industry, which can lead to the development of industry-relevant training programs and internships. The development of curricula that are relevant to current and future needs would update the inclusion of the latest medical practices, technologies, and patient care strategies. NEP also aligns with the national skill development missions, which would lead to a well-prepared and skilled healthcare workforce.