

Transforming India's Higher Education System Towards Global Competitiveness

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Abstract

The transformation of higher education systems has become a strategic issue in responding to globalization and increasing international competition. India, as a developing country, has undertaken educational reforms through the National Education Policy (NEP) to enhance the quality and global competitiveness of its higher education system. This study aims to analyze the transformation process of India's education system through national education policies and to identify the strategies implemented to build a high-quality education system recognized internationally. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, utilizing literature review methods from various academic sources and policy documents. The findings indicate that the transformation of India's education system is carried out comprehensively through structural reforms, competency-based curriculum development, integration of digital technology, and strengthening of higher education governance. These transformations are oriented toward improving adaptive and globally relevant learning quality. Furthermore, the strategies implemented include strengthening teacher professionalism, promoting technology-based learning innovation, enhancing research and higher education systems, and advancing internationalization through global collaboration and academic mobility. In conclusion, these transformation processes and strategies significantly contribute to improving the quality of higher education and strengthening India's global competitiveness.

Keywords

Education Transformation, Higher Education, National Education Policy, Education Quality, Global Competitiveness



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INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic instrument for building national competitiveness amid the dynamics of globalization and the technology-driven industrial revolution. From the perspective of international relations and national development, the education system is no longer understood merely as a means of transferring knowledge, but rather as the

foundation for developing human capital, which determines a country's position in global competition. Developing countries, including India, have made education reform a priority agenda to promote economic growth, technological innovation, and enhanced international reputation (Woessmann, 2021).

India is one of the countries with the largest education systems in the world, with millions of educational institutions ranging from primary schools to higher education institutions serving a population of more than 1.4 billion people. This enormous scale makes educational governance in India both an administrative challenge and a strategic opportunity for national development (UNESCO, 2022). Education in India functions not only as a means of enhancing individual capacity but also as an instrument of social mobility and strengthening the country's economic competitiveness within the global system. With a predominantly working-age population, the effectiveness of the education system is a key factor in determining India's success in capitalizing on its demographic dividend (UNDP, 2022).

Historically, India's education system has been shaped by the British colonial legacy, which influenced the structure of the curriculum, examination system, and the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education. Following independence, the Indian government sought to reform the system through various national policies, including the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) of 1968 and 1986, which was subsequently revised in 1992 (India, 1992). These policies emphasized equitable access, improving the quality of basic education, and strengthening science and technology education as the foundation for national development. However, India's social, economic, and geographical complexities have made policy implementation challenging, often resulting in disparities among states, meaning that the outcomes have not yet been fully equitable (Bank, 2018).

Despite significant progress, India's education system continues to face various structural challenges (UNESCO, 2022). The disparity in access between urban and rural areas remains a major concern, alongside inconsistent learning quality due to differences in infrastructure and the competencies of teaching personnel. In addition, low levels of basic literacy in some regions, high dropout rates, and the mismatch between educational curricula and industry needs indicate a disconnect between educational outcomes and the demands of the global labor market. These challenges have prompted the Indian government to pursue systemic transformation through a national education policy that is more adaptive, inclusive, and focused on improving quality and international competitiveness.

In response to significant challenges in ensuring equitable access, improving educational quality, and meeting the competency demands of the twenty-first century, the Government of India launched the *National Education Policy* (NEP) 2020 as a transformative policy aimed at comprehensively reforming the education system. The policy emphasizes a holistic approach, curriculum flexibility, the integration of digital technology, the strengthening of research and innovation, the internationalization of higher education, and the enhancement of teacher quality. NEP 2020 also introduced a new 5+3+3+4 curricular

structure to replace the previous 10+2 system, as an effort to align education with students' cognitive development (Sharma, 2020).

This transformation is aimed not only at improving domestic educational quality but also at strengthening the international competitiveness of India's education system. Over the past several decades, India has emerged as a major global hub for higher education and information technology, with renowned institutions such as the *Indian Institutes of Technology* (IITs) and *Indian Institutes of Management* (IIMs) gaining international recognition. In addition, India has sought to attract international students and promote global research collaboration through policies aimed at the internationalization of higher education. These efforts demonstrate that education has become an integral part of India's soft power strategy within the international system (Dey, 2020). India's higher education internationalization strategy within the framework of NEP 2020 is not limited to enhancing student mobility but also focuses on strengthening institutional reputation through cross-border academic collaboration, creating opportunities for foreign universities to operate in India, and encouraging Indian higher education institutions to establish campuses abroad. This policy reflects a paradigm shift from a predominantly domestic-oriented approach to a globally competitive higher education system. Thus, education is positioned as a strategic instrument for developing a knowledge economy while simultaneously strengthening India's bargaining position in the geopolitical landscape shaped by knowledge (Nagda, 2025).

On the other hand, this transformation also faces significant structural challenges, including disparities in educational quality across regions, the digital divide, limited education funding capacity, and the readiness of human resources to implement the new curriculum and governance reforms (Nagamani, 2024). The implementation of NEP 2020 requires strong coordination between the central government and the states, given the complex federal structure of India's education system. Therefore, the success of this policy is determined not only by its normative design but also by the effectiveness of governance, political commitment, and institutional capacity during the implementation stage (Mangamma, 2020). From an international relations perspective, education reform through NEP 2020 can be analyzed as part of India's long-term strategy to build global influence based on human capital and technological innovation. A strong higher education system contributes to increased research output, the development of technology-based industries, and the strengthening of India's academic diaspora networks across various countries. Thus, education policy is no longer merely a domestic issue but has become an integral element of national development and international diplomacy.

This approach demonstrates how developing countries can utilize education reform as an instrument of structural transformation as well as a strategic asset within an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based international system. Ultimately, the success of India's educational transformation depends heavily on the government's ability to bridge the gap between policy objectives and the realities of implementation. Strengthening the quality of human resources, ensuring equitable access to educational and technological

infrastructure, and enhancing institutional capacity are crucial factors in ensuring that the education reform agenda produces not only normative changes but also tangible improvements in the quality of education.

Accordingly, the transformation of India's education system through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 constitutes a significant phenomenon for academic study. Analyzing the transformation process, as well as strategies for enhancing educational quality and international competitiveness, is essential to understanding how developing countries can develop education systems that are adaptive, inclusive, and globally competitive (Panjeta, 2020). These aspects therefore constitute the primary focus of the research questions formulated in this study, as follows:

1. How has the transformation of India's education system through the National Education Policy contributed to improving the quality of education?
2. What strategies have been implemented by the Indian government to develop a high-quality education system that is internationally recognized?

This study focuses on analyzing the transformation of India's higher education system from the perspectives of education policy and international relations. The study examines not only the changes and policy directions established through NEP 2020 in an effort to improve educational quality, but also analyzes the Indian government's strategies for developing a higher education system capable of adapting to global dynamics, strengthening competitiveness, and gaining international recognition. Through this study, it is expected that a more comprehensive understanding can be obtained of the transformation process and education policy strategies adopted by India in establishing a high-quality and globally competitive higher education system.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review (library research) using a qualitative approach to analyze the data and information obtained. This method is used to examine and analyze various written sources related to the transformation of India's higher education system, particularly changes in national education policy and government strategies for improving the quality and competitiveness of higher education at the global level. The research data are obtained from secondary sources, including Indian government policy documents, scholarly journals, books, reports from national and international institutions, and various academic publications relevant to the research focus. As an analytical framework, this study draws upon George C. Edwards III's Policy Implementation theory and the concept of Soft Power developed by Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Policy Implementation theory is used to analyze the process of transforming India's education system through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with particular emphasis on how the policy is implemented to improve the quality of higher education. According to Edwards III, the effective implementation of a policy depends on several interrelated elements, including clear communication, adequate resources, the disposition

and responsiveness of implementers, and bureaucratic structures and procedures. Through this theoretical framework, the study analyzes the extent to which the implementation of NEP 2020 has contributed to transforming India's higher education system into one that is more adaptive, high-quality, and responsive to global developments.

Furthermore, the *Soft Power* theory is employed to analyze the Indian government's strategies for developing a high-quality higher education system that is internationally recognized. According to Joseph S. Nye, Jr., the concept of *soft power* refers to a country's capacity to influence other actors or states by relying on the power of attraction (*attraction*) rather than coercion (*coercion*) or economic incentives. In the context of this study, higher education is viewed as an instrument of *soft power* that contributes to enhancing academic reputation, expanding international cooperation, strengthening student and academic staff mobility, and improving India's competitiveness within the global education system. The primary source of this study is the *National Education Policy* (NEP) 2020, issued by the *Ministry of Education, Government of India*, supplemented by relevant scholarly journals, books, and reports. Data are analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach through several stages, namely selecting relevant information, organizing the data into a systematic presentation, and drawing conclusions. These stages are employed to examine developments in education policy and assess the Indian government's efforts to establish a high-quality higher education system capable of competing at the international level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of India's Higher Education System through the National Education Policy

1. Policy Foundations for the Transformation of India's Higher Education System (National Education Policy/NEP)

The transformation of India's higher education system cannot be separated from the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which marked a major milestone in education reform after more than three decades under the previous policy framework. The policy was formulated in response to the dynamics of globalization, technological developments, and the need to enhance the quality of human resources capable of competing internationally. NEP 2020 serves not only as a policy document but also as a strategic framework for transforming India's education system into one that is more inclusive, adaptive, and future-oriented. Conceptually, NEP 2020 is founded on fundamental principles encompassing access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability as the main pillars of national education development. These principles emphasize that educational transformation should not focus solely on increasing educational access and quantity, but also on improving the quality and relevance of education in addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century. Accordingly, the policy positions higher education as a strategic instrument for fostering the development of a knowledge-based society (Jandhyala, 2018).

In the context of higher education, NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to the learning process. Higher education

institutions are encouraged to integrate diverse fields of study to prepare graduates who not only possess academic competencies but also develop critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills. This approach reflects a paradigm shift from a sectoral education system toward one that is more flexible and integrated (Sharma, 2021). The policy also directs transformation toward structural and institutional aspects through the restructuring of the higher education system and the establishment of more integrated regulatory bodies. One of the strategic measures proposed is the establishment of the *Higher Education Commission of India* (HECI) as an institution intended to integrate the functions of regulation, accreditation, and funding of higher education. This initiative aims to improve the efficiency, transparency, and quality of higher education governance in India (Varghese, 2019).

In addition, NEP 2020 places the strengthening of research and innovation at the core of efforts to improve the quality of higher education. The establishment of the *National Research Foundation (NRF)* is one of the key instruments for promoting research productivity and collaboration among educational institutions, industry, and government. These efforts are expected to enhance the contribution of higher education to the development of a knowledge- and innovation-based economy (Fattah, 2016). The transformation of higher education under NEP 2020 is also characterized by the integration of digital technology into learning processes and educational management. Technology is viewed not merely as a supporting tool but as an integral component in creating a more flexible, inclusive, and efficient education system. This approach is consistent with the need to expand access to education and improve the quality of learning in the digital era (Mulyasa, 2019).

Overall, the policy foundations of NEP 2020 reflect the Indian government's systematic efforts to transform higher education through a comprehensive and sustainable approach. The policy emphasizes not only structural and curricular reforms but also a paradigm shift toward an education system that is more adaptive, innovative, and globally oriented. Thus, NEP 2020 serves as a key foundation for efforts to improve the quality and international competitiveness of India's higher education system (Sadgopal, 2022). The implementation of NEP 2020 also reflects a policy orientation that extends beyond internal reform to enhancing the adaptability of the higher education system to dynamic global changes. This is evident in efforts to promote flexible educational pathways, recognize lifelong learning, and integrate formal and non-formal education. This approach demonstrates that the transformation of higher education in India is neither partial nor fragmented, but rather holistic and sustainable, with the ultimate goal of developing an education system that is resilient, inclusive, and competitive at the global level (Komariah, 2015).

2. Restructuring of *higher* education system and governance and Development of competency-based curriculum

The restructuring of the higher education system is one of the key agendas of India's education reform, aimed at creating a system that is more efficient, integrated, and adaptable to global changes. This transformation is intended to address institutional complexity while

improving the effectiveness of higher education management. In this context, restructuring encompasses not only organizational aspects but also a paradigm shift toward a more modern approach to educational governance that is responsive to contemporary needs (Lingard, 2017). One concrete form of this restructuring is the simplification of the regulatory system through the strengthening of more integrated higher education governing institutions. The previously fragmented governance model is being reformed into a more coordinated system, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability in the administration of higher education. This approach is expected to reduce excessive bureaucracy and promote greater efficiency in policy-making (Mathew, 2021).

In addition, the restructuring includes strengthening the autonomy of higher education institutions in managing academic and administrative affairs. This autonomy provides institutions with greater flexibility to innovate in the development of educational programs, research, and community engagement. However, such autonomy is balanced by rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to maintain the quality and accountability of higher education institutions (Gupta, 2019). Within the context of governance, the quality assurance system is an essential element in ensuring the success of higher education restructuring. The implementation of quality standards is carried out continuously through accreditation mechanisms and institutional performance evaluations. This aims to maintain consistency in educational quality while enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions at both the national and international levels.

In line with the restructuring of the system, the development of a competency-based curriculum has become a major focus in improving the quality of higher education. This curriculum is designed to produce graduates who possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills relevant to the demands of the labor market. This approach emphasizes the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Sanjaya, 2016). Competency-based curricula provide flexibility in the learning process through the application of a credit-based system that allows students to take courses across different disciplines. This flexibility reflects a shift in the educational paradigm toward a more open and adaptive system. Furthermore, this approach supports the concept of lifelong learning, which has become increasingly important in the era of globalization (Suyanto, 2018).

The restructuring of the higher education system is also directed toward strengthening institutional capacity through improvements in the quality of institutional management. Higher education institutions are encouraged to adopt modern, performance-based management practices, including strategic planning, efficient resource management, and the strengthening of management information systems. These measures aim to improve the effectiveness of higher education institutional management so that institutions can respond effectively to increasingly complex demands and changes at the global level.

On the other hand, the development of a competency-based curriculum also requires the integration of academic and professional practice. This is implemented by incorporating

project-based learning and problem-based learning approaches. Both approaches provide students with opportunities to connect theoretical understanding with the resolution of problems in real-world situations. The curriculum is therefore not solely oriented toward the delivery of subject matter and knowledge, but also toward developing students' ability to apply their knowledge in practical contexts, but also serves as an instrument for developing practical skills that are aligned with the demands and evolving needs of the labor market (Brophy, 2018). The success of system restructuring and competency-based curriculum development depends largely on synergy among policies, institutions, and education stakeholders. Consistent implementation, along with support from all relevant stakeholders, is essential to ensuring that higher education reform is carried out effectively and sustainably. Through such an integrated approach, India's higher education system is expected to produce graduates who are not only academically capable but also highly competitive in addressing global challenges (Tilaar, 2017).

Strategies for Improving the Quality and Competitiveness of Higher Education at the International Level

The Indian government's efforts to improve the quality and competitiveness of higher education constitute an important component of the implementation of the National Education Policy, which is aimed at strengthening the competitiveness and international standing of Indian higher education institutions. In this context, the Indian government has adopted a strategic approach that focuses not only on improving the internal aspects of the education system but also on enhancing the relevance of education to global needs. This reflects a paradigm shift in higher education from a predominantly national orientation toward a more internationally oriented and competitive system (Rangan, 2020). One of the key strategies adopted is the enhancement of the quality of human resources in education, particularly teaching and academic support staff. The Indian government promotes continuous professional development through training, certification, and the enhancement of faculty members' academic capacities. These efforts aim to ensure that educators possess competencies aligned with international standards and are capable of producing highly qualified graduates.

In addition, the development of technology-based learning innovations has become an important strategy for improving the quality of higher education. The utilization of digital technology enables the creation of more flexible, interactive, and inclusive learning systems. Online and blended learning models are increasingly being strengthened as part of an educational transformation that is responsive to global technological developments (Bates, 2019). In efforts to strengthen global competitiveness, India also emphasizes research and innovation as key pillars of higher education. The government encourages collaboration among higher education institutions, industry, and research organizations to increase scientific productivity and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. This strategy not only enhances the academic reputation of institutions but also strengthens India's position within the global research ecosystem.

The internationalization of education represents another key strategy for enhancing the competitiveness of higher education. Indian higher education institutions are encouraged to establish partnerships with international educational institutions through student exchange programs, research collaborations, and the development of joint academic programs. These efforts aim to increase global visibility and expand international academic networks. On the other hand, improving the quality of higher education is also supported by strengthening a continuous quality assurance system. The performance of higher education institutions is systematically evaluated through accreditation and rankings at both the national and international levels. These mechanisms play an important role in ensuring that educational quality standards are maintained and continuously improved (Fattah, 2019).

Overall, the strategies for improving the quality and competitiveness of higher education in India demonstrate a comprehensive and integrated approach. Synergy among the enhancement of human resource quality, learning innovation, the strengthening of research, internationalization, and quality assurance constitutes a key factor in developing a globally competitive higher education system. Thus, these strategies contribute not only to improving the internal quality of education but also to strengthening India's position within the international higher education landscape (Suyanto, 2016). As part of its efforts to further strengthen global competitiveness, the Indian government has also promoted the development of internationally oriented higher education institutions through the *Institution of Eminence* (IoE) initiative. This program aims to establish higher education institutions with greater autonomy in academic and non-academic matters, enabling them to compete in global university rankings. Through this policy support, Indian higher education institutions are encouraged to enhance the quality of research, scholarly publications, and academic reputation at the international level.

Strengthening collaboration between higher education institutions and the industrial sector is one of the strategic measures to ensure that graduates possess competencies relevant to labor market needs. Such collaboration is realized through various activities, including internship programs, applied research initiatives, and curriculum development that responds to evolving industry requirements. Through these collaborative arrangements, the gap between the academic environment and professional demands can be narrowed, enabling students to develop the competencies necessary to compete in the global labor market (Govinda, 2017). In the era of globalization, academic mobility has also become an important indicator of the competitiveness of higher education. The Indian government actively promotes student and faculty mobility through various scholarship programs and international partnerships. Such mobility not only enhances academic experience but also broadens global perspectives and strengthens international networks, thereby contributing to improvements in the quality of education (Philip, 2015).

Within the context of educational internationalization, strengthening institutional capacity to attract international students has become an important indicator of global competitiveness. Higher education institutions in India have begun developing English-

medium programs, streamlining admission procedures for international students, and enhancing academic and non-academic services in accordance with international standards. These efforts aim to position India as a competitive global education destination, particularly within the Asian region. In addition, the digitalization of education plays a strategic role in expanding the internationalization of higher education. Online learning platforms and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) enable Indian educational institutions to reach learners from different countries without geographical limitations. The utilization of these technologies not only enhances educational accessibility but also strengthens India's position within the global digital education ecosystem (Malhotra, 2019).

Furthermore, strengthening academic reputation through improving the quality of international scholarly publications is an important aspect of supporting the global competitiveness of higher education. Indian higher education institutions are encouraged to increase their contributions to reputable international journals and expand cross-border research collaborations. A strong academic reputation can contribute to improvements in university rankings and enhance global confidence in the quality of India's higher education system. The success of strategies for improving the quality and competitiveness of higher education in India is determined not only by comprehensively designed policies but also by the consistency of their implementation and the capacity to adapt to continuously evolving global dynamics (Marginson, 2016). Therefore, the sustainability of education reform requires long-term commitment from the government, educational institutions, and all stakeholders to continuously pursue innovation, evaluation, and the strengthening of educational system capacity.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of India's education system through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a comprehensive, systemic, and long-term education reform. The reform is manifested through the restructuring of the education system, the development of competency-based curricula, the strengthening of multidisciplinary education, the integration of digital technology into the learning process, and the modernization of educational governance to make it more adaptive and accountable. These changes are fundamentally aimed at improving the quality, flexibility, relevance, and inclusiveness of India's education system so that it can respond to developments in science and technology, as well as the demands of society and the labor market within a global context.

In the implementation process, the Indian government has adopted various strategies to strengthen educational quality while enhancing its competitiveness at the international level. These strategies employ a multidimensional approach encompassing the professional development of educators, the advancement of technology-based learning innovations, the strengthening of research and innovation ecosystems, the enhancement of institutional autonomy and higher education governance, and the internationalization of education through expanded global academic cooperation. These strategies demonstrate that India's

education transformation is not solely focused on internal improvements within the education system but is also directed toward developing educational capacity capable of competing and gaining international recognition. Thus, the transformation of India's education system through NEP 2020 demonstrates a paradigm shift from an education system primarily focused on structure and knowledge transmission toward one that emphasizes competencies, innovation, technology, research, and global connectivity. The success of this transformation depends heavily on the consistency of policy implementation, infrastructure readiness, the quality of human resources, and the government's ability to address disparities in educational access and quality across regions. Therefore, NEP 2020 can be viewed as a strategic instrument for India in developing an education system that is not only nationally high-quality but also capable of strengthening India's position and competitiveness within the global education landscape.

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