Implementing Role and Opportunities of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) for Cutting-Edge Sustainable Development in the 21st Century

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Abstract-- To improve education quality and governance, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) has proposed four regulatory entities, including the National Accreditation Council (NAC). To build up India as a universal knowledge giant over the next ten years, the policy promotes equitable educational opportunities and transformative initiatives. To significantly improve the standards for higher education in India, quality control, accreditation, & ranking systems become crucial. With an emphasis on quality, employability, and lifelong learning, the National Education Policy-2020 (NEP-2020) seeks to create a flexible, value-based educational system that integrates 21st-century capabilities. India's higher education is currently at a critical juncture, requiring transformation to enhance its overall contribution to society and address social injustices. This involves examining how information is produced and how students are taught to promote sustainability and social responsibility. Higher education institutions must comprehend and address student expectations regarding quality because the service sector is expanding quickly due to liberalization, privatization, and globalization. As a result, evaluating service quality becomes crucial for future enhancements and feedback. The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) legislation, 2018, was introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development toward the end of June with the goal of repealing the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956, which has been in place for seven decades. The HECI will interchange with the University Grants Commission (UGC), which has been the foundation of India's college and university structure. This transition analyzes the proposed bill and examines its shortcomings. This advocates that the current bill be unsuccessful in reporting the flaws of the previous official; instead, it merely reflects those issues and will not resolve the long-standing problems of low autonomy and subpar instruction in the higher education system. As the new regulator, HECI's strategy isn't very revolutionary. Regulators who encourage centralization of duties to reduce autonomy must be disregarded at moments when Indian institutions are striving to rank highly in the world.

Keywords--University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956, Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

India requires a strong, adaptable, sustainable, technology-integrated, and values-based education system for the twenty-first century. India requires a higher education ecosystem that can foster social progress to uphold international standards. Maintaining global competitiveness requires a very thorough effort. This task is made feasible by an enlightening system that is grounded in regional philosophy and tradition while maintaining a worldwide norm. Since the National Education Policy-2020 aims to retain quality, create employability, and have affordability and accountability, it differs from previous educational policies. This policy's numerous beginning and ending points are among its most distinctive aspects. It also promotes lifelong learning and places a strong emphasis on inclusive, equitable, high-quality education. The framework suggested by NEP2020 includes the space for transparency, proper functioning, and an integrated governance structure. The policy aims to create a dynamic knowledge society by incorporating 21st-century skills in education. India possesses leadership that is spiritual, transformational, and transactional. India would become a knowledge superpower as a result in the upcoming years. India is striving to achieve this goal and establish "Vikshit Bharat." India's higher education scene has changed significantly since independence, thanks to the "Right to Education Act," which has managed to achieve notable growth in both the number of institutions and student enrollments. This act significantly improved the educational system recently by requiring children between the ages of 6 and 14 to attend school. Commercial companies now run around 60% of universities. Between 1950 and 2014, the total number of universities rose from 20 to 677, but many still lack international recognition. Despite these improvements, there are still issues, such as poor secondary school enrollment and completion rates, a shortage of trained teaching staff, and a 25% illiteracy rate. After the US and China, India has the third-largest advanced education structure in the world.

It is mostly governed by the University Grants Commission, which is essential in setting standards and encouraging academic cooperation. To abolish the UGC Act and establish the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), the Union government has chosen to draft the Higher Education Commission of India (Absolution of University Grants Commission Act) Act 2018. The new highest authority for regulating Indian universities and higher education will be HECI. Enhancing academic standards & the quality of higher education will be the main goals of HECI. India's higher education system is highly composite and widely distributed. One of the primary challenges facing India's developed education system is its complexity. The present unhappy state of developed education in India is due in part to the fact that there are many regulators with different standards, levels of monitoring, and assessments. Most of the nation's universities, affiliated colleges, and technical and management institutes are governed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), which are housed under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) at the Center. In addition, other regulatory bodies that establish standards and guidelines for professional programs in fields like law, medicine, and agriculture include the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), the Medical Council of India (MCI), and the Bar Council of India (BCI). However, state universities and affiliated institutions, which enroll over 90% of India's students seeking advanced education, are required to comply with these national standards in addition to aligning themselves with state administration bodies and their regulations. There are presently 10,011 independent educational institutions, 39,050 colleges, and 903 universities in India. Due to their severe underfunding and involvement in both state and federal politics, these institutions and their affiliated colleges are frequently criticized for being of poor quality. Under the corresponding university acts, the heads and chairs of these institutions are always political appointees, leading to such criticism. These organizations are likewise subject to UGC regulation. Academics have criticized UGC for misusing finances and power, among other things (Yash Pal Committee, 2009 & Hari Gautam Committee, 2015). The UGC Act of 1956 provides it the authority to carry out the following important tasks, among others:

- Create and grow universities and other higher education institutions; provide funding for their upkeep;
- Suggest ways to improve and put them into practice;
- Give states advice on how to distribute cash to colleges;
- Teach universities about global best practices;
- Request information from institutions regarding courses, instruction, exams, and financial standing; and
- Decide on faculty qualifications, manage course and program intake and admissions, and regulate fees.

The micromanagement of state institutions by UGC throughout the years has resulted in a reduction in both the autonomy and educational quality of these eight institutions. The National Higher Education Mission (NHEM), also known as Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), was established by the Ministry for Human Resource Development in 2013 to plan funding for state universities & their affiliated colleges. However, in this case, the funds ultimately went to the National Mission Authority, which also demonstrates UGC's involvement. In reality, despite the wide range of institutions it serves, the amount of money allocated to RUSA increased by a meager INR 100 crore in the 2018 budget. However, UGC's funding was cut from INR 4,922.7 crore, the budget forecast for the previous year, to INR 4,722.7 10 crore. The Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD) has recently attempted to free top-performing institutions from the grip of regulators through several policy initiatives, including the newly broadcast Societies of Distinction scheme and the Graded Autonomy Policy under UGC.

Graded Autonomy Scheme: Under the Graded Autonomy Scheme, institutes nationwide were categorized into Grades I through III in May 2017 and granted varying degrees of autonomy based on their stature and performance. For example, grade I institutions are able to develop their own courses, award degrees, and set up 0-11 campus centers overseas. On the other hand, the Institutes of Eminence program will assist ten public and ten private institutions in transforming into world-class institutions. The UGC and 12 AICTE will not impose any regulations on either category, even though the public institutes will receive funding of INR 1,000 crore each. However, as of right now, just six institutions have been chosen to become 13 Institutes of Excellence. The MHRD released the HECI Bill, 2018, which aims to eliminate UGC, on June 27, 2018. The draft measure seeks to remove financing authority from the planned HECI and make it accountable for reinstating institutional autonomy and upholding academic standards.

Quality Assurance: Quality assurance, accreditation, & ranking systems play a critical role in nurturing the educational values of Indian advanced education institutions.

The National Education Policy-2020 (NEP-2020) places a robust importance on excellent higher education to produce employable young people and economic independence for the learners. It offers a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, value-based education with room for individualized achievement to make learners' lives productive and meaningful. According to the policy, a high-quality higher education must guarantee individual success and understanding, beneficial community participation, and beneficial contributions to the general public. The aforementioned must foster economic independence and educate students for more articulate and sustained lives and careers. HEI stakeholders do contribute significantly to higher education quality assurance. Their comments and recommendations aid HEIs in raising the standard of instruction. The regulatory agencies formulate policies and monitor the operations of HEIs. Their stringent rules and policies are also occasionally adjusted to reflect current events.

Accreditation: Accreditation is meant to raise the standard of advanced education while fostering research in India. The NEP has awarded multiple points for implementing these changes. The input-driven method will be replaced with an outcome-based one. In 1994, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council was founded. It has performed admirably. The NAAC procedure as a whole must be in line with NEP. Instead of conducting peer team inspections, NAC should serve as a hand holder and facilitator. The NAAC has explicit guidelines for submitting AQARs (Annual Quality Assurance Reports) and SSRs (Self-Study Reports). Both quantitative and qualitative matrices are used for evaluation. The regulatory mechanism's primary goal is to guarantee an institution's seamless and conflict-free operation. Multiple governing agencies for a single course, however, could cause issues. For instance, it has been observed that when an institution plans to offer a teacher education course, the dual regulations (by the NCTE and UGC, for example) can cause confusion. In addition to NCTE, there are a number of other regulatory bodies that make it difficult to obey the rules, including the AICTE, AIU, CoA (Council of Architecture), DCI (Dental Council of India), DEC (Distant Education Council), ICAR, MCI (Medical Council of India), PCI (Pharmacy Council of India), VCI (Veterinary Council of India), RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India), and most importantly, UGC. Several regulatory agencies govern the college and university system, and disputes arise between them. The regulatory bodies may attempt to avoid their responsibilities, and regulations are not always explicit.

The quality of education depends on uniform regulation and regulatory organizations. However, it appears difficult for an institution to decide which of the many governing bodies in India's advanced education system to adhere to. An institution must run its files through several windows, such as UGC and NCTE, among others, when it wishes to launch a new teacher education course. Both the school and the pupils eventually consider it difficult to comprehend and abide by the rules. Thus, a united regulating body and well-defined regulations will aid in raising the standard of education. It will also make it easier to establish new institutions, specify the goals of the courses, highlight the requirements for candidates to be eligible, and establish the conditions for finishing them. A distinct organization that administers the higher education system is the Sophisticated Education Commission of India. NEP recommends the following four organizations to supervise higher education:

1. Regulatory Authority for Higher Education
2. Council for General Education
3. Evaluation and Certification of Postsecondary Education
4. An organization that finances higher education

According to NEP2020, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) will assist as the primary regulatory agency. The National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) will be the first HECI authority or vertical, according to NEP. With the exception of healing and lawful education, it will serve as a monitoring expert for all Advanced Education Institutions (HEIs), including those that educate. Additionally, it will regulate the HEIs as a single-window system by removing regulatory disjunction and redundancy. In order for HEIs to operate properly, they must also be responsible for reviewing and updating the current regulations. Finally, but just as importantly, the NHERC will handle stakeholder complaints and operate under the "light but tight" administration principle.

The National Accreditation Council (NAC), the second vertical of HECI, will be responsible for accrediting universities in accordance with their respective Institutional Development Plans (IDPs). Furthermore, the NAC will ensure sound governance and a distinct ecosystem within the organization, based on standards and transparent self-disclosure. NAC will replace NAAC. A regulatory organization that handles the economics and finances of higher education will make up the third vertical under HECI. The Higher Education Grants Commission (HEGC) will be responsible for HEI finance and financing. It will deal with HEI finance and scholarships.

General Education Council (GEC) will be the name of HECI's fourth vertical. It will establish the academic requirements for India's higher education system. Additionally, it will collaborate with the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSFQ) to assure that employment education is appropriately included in higher education. Other regulatory organizations, such as VCI, NCTE, and ICAR, are required by NEP to participate as Professional Standard Setting Bodies (PSSBs).

Systems of Ranking: A suitable evaluation system must be in place to gauge HEI standards. The result of a methodical assessment of HEI's performance is ranking. The natural environments in higher education institutions must act as change agents to establish a healthy atmosphere. They should contribute in a way that promotes social progress and boosts the country's economy. HEIs are essential for advancing innovation and research. They ought to encourage academics and staff to engage in innovative research. They ought to promote skill development as well. To satisfy the demands of the industry, HEIs must change. Students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders are the main emphasis of any HEI. HEIs are ranked according to their performance after being assessed using performance metrics. To stay up to date with international standards, this ranking is required. The requirement should be such that academic credit transfer is unproblematic and that it may draw in international students. To become "Vishwa Gurus," Indian HEIs must contend with the best universities in the United States and the United Kingdom.

SIGNIFICANCE: The NEP 2020 milestones include the following:

Equity and Existence: Faculty will undergo regular training through computer-generated, virtual, or in-person sessions featuring expert lectures across various academic disciplines. NEP 2020 prioritizes equity and inclusion to enhance access to success, improve the learning environment's quality, and support health care for faculty and students. Every faculty member should have experience in demonstration teaching. Faculty members must be motivated to participate in in-person or virtual training to expand their knowledge and sharpen their teaching abilities.

Action Research: To enhance the teaching and learning environment in the classroom, faculty members should work on action research projects. To improve their productivity, faculty members can take part in workshops, webinars, and seminars.

• *Excellence:* A university should strive for excellence. The university should positively impact academic excellence. To create a positive learning environment, there should be staff, student, and teaching excellence. Excellence in research should also be a priority. If we guaranteed excellence in management and leadership, it would naturally follow.

II. Current Scenario Need

In addition to highlighting the functional independence of universities and deemed universities, the proposed draft grants the regulatory body the authority to "authorize" the continuation of current institutions or their closure within three years. HECI will publish the curriculum that academic institutions must adhere to and establish the rules for awarding degrees. One curriculum, one country is ineffective. India constitutes a diverse nation; thus, developing courses requires a great deal of flexibility. The suggested draft describes the review process and possible courses of action for HECI.

An annual assessment is impractical and will probably turn into a ritual. It is more practical to review every five years. The phrase, "The Chief Executive, along with other members of Management who do not comply with the penalty imposed by the Commission, must be liable for legal action as per the procedures laid down in the Criminal Procedure Code and may face imprisonment for a term of up to three years," is harsh and incompatible with autonomy.

India has done a successful job of educating the general public in the seven decades since independence, according to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) reports that are released annually by the MHRD. In order to guarantee gender parity and societal inclusivity, the base of the pyramid may have expanded, ensuring that those who are socially disadvantaged receive assistance in climbing the ladder. To achieve the highest level of excellence, the next challenge is to raise the standard of education and research facilities. This calls for a significant financial investment to upgrade the fundamental infrastructure of both state and federal organizations. Leaders in science and technology, as well as the arts and humanities, will not arise unless college and university levels enhance their educational standards and infrastructure (laboratories). Many state & central universities have terrible infrastructure, as can be shown by taking a more comprehensive look at particular institutions. Over the years, attempts have been made to address the issue through the Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi's Fund for Improvement of S&T Infrastructure in Universities and Higher Educational Institutions (FIST).

However, it was made plain by the game's regulations that the money could not be used for construction or other essential infrastructure. Most higher education institutions had access to basic equipment because of equipment grants. However, the advancement of the fundamental infrastructure has struggled to keep up with the times. When we examine industrialized nations, we find that there is little infrastructure difference between the best institutions and those that come after. No matter where a student enrolls, those institutions guarantee a minimum level of education quality.

India continues to be a developing country that aspires to be developed. This editorial's goal is to outline the necessary actions if we want to capitalize on the demographic dividend & become a preeminent center for science and technology. We must make significant investments from the ground up as well as in prestigious institutions. Modernize all laboratories and demolish or renovate historic structures, some of which are designated as heritage. Loans from the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) would not be accepted. Establishing Institutes of Eminence remains crucial, but it also necessitates improving the foundational infrastructure at the feeder institutes, which are colleges and universities. The adage "quality input begets quality output" should not be overlooked. High-quality instructors will guarantee high-quality graduates, who will then guarantee high-quality faculty contributions to the system. Quality instructors and students have a connective interaction. Internationalization of our academic institutions is vital. We must actively seek out and hire international faculty and students. Our campuses need to be brought up to international standards. There is no way to be safe in the labs. It's a lifestyle. I discovered that neighboring nations are keen to send their youngsters to India for higher education when I visited them. It would be much better if they could receive a scholarship. In theory, students from SAARC countries are eligible for scholarships. However, no one appears to understand how to apply for them. The amount of money needed to upgrade the fundamental facilities in every academic institution can be estimated. There are no miracles. We must make methodical plans and investments over a period of time. The debate swiftly shifts to one of state versus center. The center must guarantee that both state and central institutions receive funding. Over the years, the public has paid the educational cess. This can be utilized.

The UGC's recent decision to offer autonomy to numerous universities made headlines. Many institutions have autonomy thanks to their acts and statutes. Over time, this has been undermined. This needs to be fixed everywhere.

Autonomy is required for both student admissions and curriculum design in light of evolving trends. Over the past 50 years, nationally significant institutions have leveraged their autonomy to guarantee high-quality research and instruction. The appointment of qualified educators as directors and vice chancellors is the first step in ensuring excellence in academic institutions. Committees that formerly handled searches and selections have been renamed Selection Committees. It is anticipated that candidates will apply. Many worthy and competent applicants would just not submit an application. Due to outdated purchasing practices, cash allotted in many institutions is not used promptly. The issue regarding L-1 (lowest quotation) is well known to the government. Because they fear audit complaints and referrals through the Central Vigilance Commission, administrators are reluctant to make decisions. If we are seriously concerned about protecting Indian institutions, we must quickly implement best practices from other countries. The majority of Indian institutes conduct incremental research. When working on initiatives that are at the cutting edge of science and technology, coworkers should be encouraged to take chances. Only in an environment of freedom and trust can this occur. It's time to share our actions with society. Every institute needs to expand its outreach initiatives. It is important to encourage students from various backgrounds to visit specific labs and universities in order to entice them to return for additional coursework. A lot of institutions find great success with their "open house" events. Parents, instructors, and pupils arrive in buses. They want to know what's going on in the learning citadels. The government will be forced to boost funding for educational institutions if the public is persuaded. Government agencies are not academic institutions. They must quickly acquire and create materials for both beneficial research and efficient instruction. Many organizations receive funding, but due to outdated practices, they are unable to utilize it. Simplifying purchase procedures is necessary.

1. The bill creates the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) and replaces the University Grants Commission statute of 1956.
2. By establishing learning objectives for courses, defining eligibility requirements for vice chancellors, & directing the closure of institutions that do not meet minimal requirements, the HECI will uphold academic excellence in higher education.
3. In order to start its first academic operations, any higher education institution with the authority to grant degrees or diplomas must apply to the HECI.

Additionally, the HECI can cancel permission for specific reasons.

4. The Union Minister of Human Resource Development, presently known as the Ministry of Education (MoE), will serve as the chair of the Advisory Council established under the Bill.

5. The Council will provide guidance on how the federal government and the states should coordinate and establish higher education standards.

Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) and replaces the University Grants Commission Act, 1956

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The Historical Background Of New Economic Policy (NEP)

The term "NEP" can refer to various strategies, but the new economic strategy implemented in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s is one of the most significant historical references.

1. *New Economic Policy (NEP) in the Soviet Union (1921–1928):* Following the 1917 Russian Revolution and the civil war that followed, the Bolshevik government encountered economic difficulties, such as widespread starvation and economic collapse.

Vladimir Lenin responded by introducing the new economic program in 1921 as a short-term diversion from totalitarianism. Within the framework of state control over important industries and crucial sectors, the NEP permitted limited private entrepreneurship, market mechanisms, and foreign investment. In addition to bringing about a phase of economic recovery, higher agricultural output, and relative stability, it also generated discussions about the course of Soviet economic policy inside the Communist Party.

2. *National Education Policy (NEP) India (1986 and 1992):* The national education policy in India refers to two significant government-introduced education policies. 1986 saw the adoption of the first NEP, which was updated in 1992. These initiatives sought to solve several issues with the Indian educational system, such as its growth, quality, and accessibility. They placed a strong emphasis on adult literacy initiatives, vocationalization of secondary school, universal elementary education, and the advancement of science and technology education. The NEPPs of 1986 and 1992 laid the groundwork for significant changes to the Indian educational system.

3. *National Education Policy (NEP) India (2020):* In January 2015, a committee under the leadership of former cabinet secretary Subramanian initiated the consultation process for the new education policy. A panel headed by former Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) director Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan proposed the NEP proposal in June 2017, and it was finalized in 2019, according to the committee report. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) released the 484-page draft of the new education policy (DNEP) 2019 after holding many public feedback sessions. The goal of NEP 2020 is that "the National Education Policy 2020 anticipates an India-centric education system that directly promotes the transformation of the privilege of the country becoming a vibrant knowledge society through imparting high-quality education to all" (Goel, 2020, p. 15).

In a developing country like India, higher education is essential since it fosters human development. Higher education in India has expanded significantly since the country's independence. Through the dissemination of specialized information and skills, it advances national development. The primary goals of the policy are to make India a centre for international education and raise the standard of national higher education institutions (HEIs) (Das, 2022). Offering flexibility in the curriculum through an interdisciplinary approach that permits several exit points is the main focus.

India's most current national education strategy, unveiled in 2020, focuses on accelerating research, increasing faculty support, and fostering globalization through a four-year undergraduate program (Das & Barman, 2023). It is a thorough reform of the Indian educational system with the goal of making it more adaptable, multidisciplinary, holistic, and in line with 21st-century demands. Early childhood education, basic literacy and numeracy, curriculum & pedagogical changes, teacher preparation & professional development, vocational education, digital learning, & internationalization of education are some of the main topics covered by NEPP 2020. It aims to change Indian education at the high school and college levels to better prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of the future. These are a few notable historical allusions to the term "nep" in various settings, emphasizing its significance in influencing national educational and economic policy.

Need Of The National Education Plan (NEP)

A national education policy (also known as NEP) is necessary due to the ever-changing socioeconomic environment and the necessity of giving people the knowledge and skills they need to prosper in a world that is changing quickly. A nation may require a comprehensive education policy for the following reasons:

❖ *Adaptation to shifting needs:* As societies change, so do the demands of their people. An NEP enables a nation to modify its educational system to address present and upcoming issues, whether they have to do with changes in the economy, society, or technology.

❖ *Quality improvement:* Education strategies frequently concentrate on raising the standard of instruction at all educational levels, from elementary to postsecondary. To guarantee that kids obtain a top-notch education, those efforts may entail infrastructural improvements, teacher training programs, curriculum revisions, and the implementation of contemporary teaching techniques.

❖ *Equity & participation:* By addressing gaps in educational access, and NEP can guarantee that everyone has an equal chance to learn and achieve, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or aptitude.

❖ *Compatibility with national objectives:* Education heavily influences the achievement of broader national objectives, such as social cohesion, economic progress, and environmental sustainability. These more general societal goals can be in line with educational aims through a well-designed NEP.

❖ *Global competitiveness:* As the globe grows more interconnected, nations need to equip their citizens to participate in the global economy. A NEP can provide pupils with the abilities and competencies, like mastery in foreign languages, cross-cultural communication skills, & STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, necessary to prosper in a worldwide market.

❖ *Creativity and innovation:* Education programs frequently stress the value of developing students' critical thinking, creativity, and creative abilities. These attributes are crucial for tackling difficult problems, advancing technology, and encouraging artistic and cultural expression.

❖ *Lifelong learning:* Learning is a continuous activity in the knowledge-based economy of today. A NEP can encourage a lifelong learning approach by offering people chances to learn new things and improve their skills throughout their lifetimes.

All things considered, a national education strategy acts as a guide for the creation of an educational system that not only satisfies societal demands today but also equips people to navigate and participate in an uncertain and quickly evolving future.

The Importance Of A National Education Plan (NEP)

A nation's development and advancement greatly depend on its national education policy (NEP). The NEP is important for the following reasons.

❖ *Governing vision:* The National Education Policy offers a long-term vision and development plan for the education sector, defining objectives, priorities, and tactics to raise the standard, accessibility, and applicability of education.

❖ *Holistic growth:* A well-designed NEP emphasizes both academic achievement and people's holistic development, which includes learning's cognitive, social, emotional, & physical components.

❖ *Equity & inclusion:* The National Education Plan (NEP) seeks to advance equality and diversity in education by guaranteeing that everyone has an equal chance to obtain high-quality education and reach their full potential, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or ability.

❖ *Quality enhancement:* The NEP seeks to improve education at all levels, from basic to postsecondary, by focusing on curricular reforms, teacher preparation, infrastructure development, and creative pedagogical approaches.

❖ *Skill development:* The NEP focuses on giving students the knowledge, abilities, and competencies required to thrive in the 21st-century workforce in today's quickly evolving world. These abilities include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, & digital literacy.

❖ *Encouraging creativity and innovation:* The NEP promotes entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation among students, cultivating a culture of discovery, experimentation, and lifelong learning that is crucial for tackling difficult problems and propelling societal advancement and economic prosperity.

❖ *Global competitiveness:* By creating a skilled labor force that can compete in the global marketplace, drawing in investment, and spurring innovation and economic growth, a well-executed NEP increases a nation's ability to compete globally.

❖ *Preservation of culture:* Many NEPs understand the value of conserving and advancing indigenous languages, knowledge, and cultural history to promote a feeling of pride, identity, and community among many groups.

❖ *Social cohesiveness:* Education is essential for establishing inclusive societies and peaceful cooperation by advancing tolerance, mutual understanding, and social cohesion.

❖ *Sustainable development:* By integrating education with more general national objectives like social justice, environmental preservation, and sustainable development, the NEP enables people to make constructive contributions to both their communities and the environment.

Considering all factors, the national education policy serves as a cornerstone for the development of an inclusive, equitable, and high-quality educational system, which is essential for promoting social advancement, individual empowerment, and national prosperity.

Higher Education Opportunities Are Accessible Through National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers several chances for postsecondary education that have the potential to change the field. These are some significant chances.

1. *Interdisciplinary Education:* The NEP promotes interdisciplinary education, which enables students to select classes from a variety of disciplines and follow a range of interests. This method encourages creativity and invention, supports holistic learning, and equips students for multidisciplinary jobs in a world that is changing quickly.

2. *Flexibility & Choice:* The policy places a strong emphasis on flexibility across higher education, giving students the freedom to select their learning paths and providing various entry and departure points in degree programs. This aspect meets the various requirements and goals of students by offering chances for job progression, skill development, and lifetime learning.

3. *Research & Innovation:* By encouraging cooperation between government, business, and academia, the NEP seeks to advance a culture of innovative thinking and research in higher education. The initiative gives organizations the chance to conduct cutting-edge research, create novel responses to societal problems, and support economic expansion and advancement.

4. *Internationalization:* By promoting cooperation among foreign universities, exchange initiatives, cooperative research projects, and twinning agreements, the policy promotes the internationalization of higher education. The result gives students access to top-notch educational materials and knowledge, increases their exposure to the world, and improves their cross-cultural competencies.

5. *Technology Integration:* To improve learning, teaching, and research procedures, the NEP places a strong emphasis on integrating technology into higher education.

6. The program offers institutions the chance to use digital platforms, web-based materials, e-learning technologies, and virtual classrooms to increase access, enhance educational results, and promote innovation in curriculum delivery and pedagogy.

7. *Entrepreneurship and Skill Development:* The policy emphasizes how crucial it is to impart to students 21st-century skills, including digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. To prepare students for the needs of the modern workforce, this program gives educational institutions the chance to include business partnerships, entrepreneurship projects, and skill development programs in their curricula.

8. *Institutional Autonomy:* By encouraging institutional accountability and autonomy, the NEPP gives universities the freedom to innovate, make strategic choices, and strive for academic excellence. This improves an institution's competitiveness and reputation both domestically and globally by enabling it to cultivate its distinct identity, strengths, and specialized fields.

9. *Holistic Education:* The policy prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, guaranteeing all students, irrespective of their circumstances or background, equal opportunity.

This provides educational institutions the chance to support underrepresented and marginalized groups, adopt affirmative action policies, and establish inclusive classrooms that value diversity and advance social justice.

Overall, the National Education Policy 2020: Existing Concerns and Reinventing the Next Generation of Higher Education presents a revolutionary vision for higher education in India by providing multiple opportunities that enable institutions to enhance quality and relevance.

National Education Policy 2020 Challenges:

NEP 2020 suggests three primary areas of attention:

❖ First, moving toward conceptual understanding rather than content-driven instruction that encouraged memorization.

❖ Second, a 360-degree evaluation that takes into account the kids' academic, mental, and physical well-being; and third, an experience method that incorporates new skills like data science and coding, mathematical and computational thinking, and vocational skills. The goal is to equip Indian students to become global citizens and prosper in the future. In the upcoming years, the Indian government seems dedicated to achieving this goal by updating curricula, training teachers, and supplying ICT-enabled infrastructure and evaluation techniques in schools. To effectively utilize its demographic advantage, India must reskill its workforce, provide vocational training, and provide job possibilities. The policy is current, and the goals are admirable. However, how well the government handles important issues and expands these changes will determine the success and rate of implementation.

❖ "The policy appears to be inadequate when it comes to school education, which is the true problem. For instance, it is terrible to assign pre-primary education to overworked, understaffed, and ill-equipped Anganwadis because they currently lack the resources needed to operate effectively. In addition, the Anganwadi workers' qualifications are 12th grade or lower, and no extra resources are planned. It is frightening to contemplate how these people can provide kids strong pre-primary preparation. This topic covers several aspects of school education, with the most significant challenges being foundational literacy and numeracy, assessment, the presence of teachers in schools, the establishment of multidisciplinary schools, and the availability of sufficient resources, among other factors.

❖ The integration of instructional methods and technology in written documents and conceptual thinking is lagging behind. The goal of NEP 2020 is to raise academic standards by encouraging students to learn their native language until they are in fifth grade. Because it lays a strong foundation, early mother tongue comprehension is essential for future academic success. However, inadequate basic knowledge prevents effective learning even with top-notch instruction and infrastructure.

❖ It's critical to acknowledge that English contributes significantly to advancement in society and the economy in India, which is consistent with the fundamental objective of education. "In these areas, where the ecosystem stretches into higher education and the workplace, home language thrives. It might not be sufficient without this ecology.

❖ The policy illustrates the importance of multilingualism. In India, the majority of classrooms teach in two languages. Regretfully, some states mistakenly believe that this policy is an ineffectual attempt to enforce Hindi.

❖ "The GDP's share of government expenditures on education reached 3.1%. The framework for educational expenses will need to be modified. A 6% of GDP public education budget remains an unattainable goal. On a larger scale, we might be able to achieve some aspects of the change at a lower cost. Given the existing tax-to-GDP ratio and conflicting demands with the national exchequer from national security, healthcare, and other important sectors, an ambitious goal of 6% of GDP for public spending is undoubtedly unachievable. Present spending has already overburdened the national coffers, making the goal considerably more challenging to meet.

❖ The policy discusses experimentation, choice, and flexibility. Diverse instructional requirements exist. There will be negative repercussions if it is a required option inside a single institution.

❖ The institution's unique character would be jeopardized if the curriculum were created to accommodate simultaneously one-year diploma students & four-year degree students. NEP 2020 requires pedagogical and curriculum changes. The boards administering the exams will have to re-evaluate their assessment procedures and choose the proper standards for learning content evaluation. It is essential that school textbooks be revised. It is noteworthy that 87% of K–12 children in India attend schools when the annual tuition charge is less than Rs 12,000. Therefore, it will be necessary for these modifications to be easily transmitted throughout school tiers.

❖ By 2030, around 250 million pupils are expected to be enrolled in K–12 institutions in India. To serve this expanding student body, India will need more than 7 million instructors. These teachers must have completed the specified B.Ed program for 12th graders, graduates, & postgraduates for four, two, and one years, respectively. With an average annual compensation of about two lakhs, teaching is a low-paying profession in India. Due to the existing approach's heavy reliance on printed material, experiential learning as well as concept-oriented teaching are hindered.

❖ The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education & Teacher Eligibility Tests (TETs) was introduced by NEP 2020 to produce qualified teachers capable of delivering high-quality instruction. Nonetheless, current educators need to receive training in these methods. If we don't address the issue of insufficient teacher compensation, it will be challenging to implement the program effectively.

❖ Digital classrooms, remote expertise-based teaching models, AR/VR tools to overcome physical teaching along with laboratory resource limitations, standardized assessments across schools (including students from remote villages), career counselling, and teacher training aids are some of the measures that must be implemented to address the necessity for digital infrastructure on a comparable scale.

❖ The strategy suggests a change to ongoing evaluation, emphasizing higher-order abilities and measuring pupils' progress with AI-based software. This calls for creative assessment techniques and tasks that encourage critical thinking and real-world application. However, educational boards and associated institutions must make large expenses to design such tests and practice tasks.

❖ The bulk of schools in India are either government-run or classified as low-cost private institutions that lack the facilities needed to carry out these evaluations. The NEP 2020 drafting committee took into account several sources when creating the policy. Additionally, a sizable amount of the education budget is being diverted from official education institutions in more affluent areas by privately owned EdTech platforms.

❖ "There are currently about 1,000 universities in India. It would need the opening of a new university every week in the next 15 years to reach the goal of doubling the gross enrollment ratio within higher education by 2035. There is no doubt that starting a university every week is an extremely difficult undertaking.

❖ The goal of NEP 2020 is to return 20 million currently unenrolled children to formal education. To achieve this goal in 15 years, we need to establish approximately 50 schools every week. In addition to requiring large investments in classrooms and campuses, this strategy calls for the constant hiring of 200–300 teachers and at least 50 headmasters per week. Given the current problem of vacant teaching posts in many schools, the situation becomes an extremely interesting dilemma. A thorough awareness of pedagogical prerequisites and well-trained teachers are essential for the policy's successful implementation.

❖ Many curricular changes need teachers to adopt new perspectives and parents to become more involved. A particularly positive step is the emphasis on interdisciplinary learning. For many years, universities have functioned in a departmentalized and segregated fashion, especially in India. With very few exceptions, scholars and teachers generally adhere to the deeply ingrained culture of concentrating mainly on particular fields. It is a difficult task to change the entire higher education system such that the majority of the professors are not only highly skilled in their specialties but also show curiosity, respect, and involvement in other topics.

Sustainable Development And Higher Education

History has shown that education has a major impact on all spheres of a nation's development—economic, social, and political—and is essential and important in these processes. As is the case with development, education is essential to sustainable development since it is acknowledged that cognitive and technical advancement as well as behavioral changes brought about by education are essential methods and approaches for sustainable development.

Higher education is a crucial tool for attaining sustainable development, and education itself is a key component of sustainability. However, we will need to consider the agenda and methods of teaching sustainability as well as the kind of education that can affect the kinds of changes required for sustainable development. However, we must offer high-quality education focused on sustainability ideals and competencies if we want to move our education closer to sustainable development. Concerns about climate change and global warming have made sustainable development a top priority on the political agenda. To solve this century's environmental and socioeconomic issues, we must raise global awareness of sustainability. Education is the most efficient means of enhancing the capabilities of all stakeholders to promote sustainable development.

Under these conditions, universities and colleges seem uniquely positioned to take on a leadership role in sustainable development. As leaders, they may conceive and plan for a worldwide and effective solution; as educational institutions, they can instruct and enable students to tackle problems pertaining to energy efficiency, climate change, and sustainability in its broadest sense. With the advancement of technology in every industry, higher education may readily assume this duty and demonstrate its applicability to societal demands. Therefore, higher education must play a crucial role by dedicating all of its resources and freedom to the service of what is pertinent and necessary for mankind and society at large. The current state of higher education must be examined and critically questioned in light of this perspective and orientation. This approach includes determining the extent to which our universities are accountable for supporting and adapting to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as how higher education must be changed and innovated to satisfy the demands of sustainable development.

The goal of sustainability is to maintain our nation and its citizens. Therefore, it makes sense to think of sustainability as a human-centered challenge. It is becoming more widely acknowledged that development must be locally driven, culturally distinctive, and participatory in order for economically underprivileged groups or nations to experience positive and long-lasting sustainable transformation. Accepting different perspectives on issues and solutions under diverse local settings or cultures would be the most significant obstacle to universities making a constructive contribution to this goal. For scholars, it would entail a paradigm change and the acceptance of localized yet systemic approaches to issue analysis, solution identification, and implementation. It entails providing assistance to initiatives aimed at recovering indigenous knowledge and sustainable, culturally inclusive attitudes. More and more proponents of sustainable higher education are calling for drastic reforms in colleges and universities. Higher education institutions must impart awareness, information, skills, and principles that enable people to pursue their life objectives in a way that improves and maintains both human and nonhuman well-being if they are to achieve a sustainable future. A paradigm shift cannot be achieved by merely adding certain courses on sustainability and environmental challenges at the graduate level, as the University Grants Commission has done. In this regard, all higher education regulatory bodies must act immediately.

III. PRINCIPAL CONCERNS AND EVALUATION OF THE SUGGESTED COMMISSION

❖ The bill seeks to advance higher education institutions' independence. Nevertheless, some of the bill's provisions fall short of this declared goal. One could argue that the bill provides HECI more regulatory control rather than giving higher education institutions more autonomy.

❖ Currently, 14 professional councils oversee organizations that provide professional training. The bill aims to include legal and architectural education under HECI's jurisdiction. Why only these two domains fall under the HECI's regulatory purview and not the other areas of professional education is unclear.

❖ The UGC currently has the authority to assign and distribute funding to colleges and universities. The bill does not contain any provisions pertaining to grant disbursement, despite replacing the UGC. This raises concerns about whether HECI will be involved in distributing subsidies to universities.

❖ Currently, the center and states get coordination and advice on education-related issues from the Central Advisory Board of Higher Education (CABE). The bill establishes an Advisory Council & mandates that HECI carry out its recommendations. These amendments could limit HECI's ability to operate as a stand-alone regulator.

IV. THE DRAFT BILL OF HECI'S HIGHLIGHTS

A. Since education is on India's concurrent list, both the federal government and the states are able to pass legislation pertaining to it. States have the authority to incorporate, manage, and wind up universities, but the center can set standards for institutions of higher learning.

B. Several authorities regulate higher education. The University Grants Commission (UGC) governs colleges and universities that offer general education. They have the authority to award funding and establish and uphold standards. The All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) governs technical education in fields such as engineering, management, and architecture.

Additionally, 14 professional organizations, including the Medical Council, the Bar Council, & the Nursing Council, regulate schools that offer courses in the fields of medicine, law, nursing, or teacher education.

C. Several expert groups, including the Committee for the Development of the New Education Policy (2016), the Yaspal Committee (2010), and the National Knowledge Commission (2009), have recommended reforms to higher education over time to address problems with funding, governance, quality, and access. They suggested combining all present regulators under a single, independent regulator, pointing out that the current regulatory structure is overregulated but undergoverned. It was intended that this organization would carry out its regulatory duties without compromising the institutional and academic independence of postsecondary educational establishments.

The Higher Education and Research Act of 2011 was presented to Parliament in 2011 with the goal of unifying all higher education regulators under a single authority. But in 2014, the bill was withdrawn. The UGC was designed after the UK's University Grants Committee and became a statutory entity in 1956 with the passage of the UGC Act. After seven decades of operation, the British panel collapsed in 1989, but the UGC remained in place with the main responsibility of supporting and overseeing India's higher education standards. Along the way, the UGC lost its focus and struggled to adapt to the growing globalization and deregulation in the education sector. The number of universities has increased rapidly over the past 60 years, from about 30 in 1956 to nearly 670 in 2015. However, the UGC has also failed to address the issue of declining educational standards. According to Amrik Singh, author of the 2003 book 50 Years of Higher Education in India, the term "Grants" in the UGC name caused a lot of confusion, with UGC officials concluding that their main responsibility was to distribute funds rather than to monitor quality.

The government has recently taken several steps to give more independence to the education sector, including

a) passing a law in 2017 for Indian Institutes of Management that reduced government involvement on their boards and allowed the board to choose the director;

b) The UGC has implemented rules that grant universities greater freedom and confer independent status on colleges; and

c) the government naming six Institutions of Eminence, which will have greater freedom in admitting foreign students, setting fees, and hiring foreign faculty. June 27, 2018, saw the release of the Higher Education Commission of India's draft (abolishing the University Grants Commission Ordinance, 1956).

V. HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION OF INDIA (HECI) FUNCTIONS

For a regulatory body to operate effectively, it is crucial to separate the authority to make grants from the authority to decide on academic matters. Despite the HECI Bill's serious consideration of this notion, it has not provided a specific plan for supporting higher education institutions (HEIs). Giving such authority to a political constitution-based government body in the current version of the bill is risky because it would ultimately limit the freedom of HEIs (their vice-chancellors or heads of institutes), who will have to submit to politicians to secure funding for their institutions. India's university system has been paralyzed for a long time by the UGC's disparities in funding state universities; the current HECI law appears to take it a step further by giving the MHRD control over the 20 systems. Moreover, the HECI Bill assigns the Committee specific, absolute tasks beyond its oversight of academic issues. These must be examined.

❖ *Regaining Independence:* The strengthening of autonomy in higher education institutions is one of the primary responsibilities assigned to the planned HECI. The HECI Bill specifies which fields of education will be regulated, even if the previous UGC Act suggested maintaining standards in university education. For example, the new bill aims to establish standards for teaching and evaluation, including curriculum development, and to define learning outcomes for higher education courses of study. It contradicts the claim that an institution can only become autonomous if it is financially, academically, and administratively independent. Similar to the UGC, the current HECI Bill appears to try to micromanage academics. Higher education institutions should, however, be allowed to develop innovative ways of evaluation other than only theoretical exams, adapt their curricula based on regional variety, and evaluate students according to the skills they have learned. In a similar vein, the HECI will outline the minimal requirements for hiring, suggest a faculty-centered governance framework for HEIs, and even provide criteria for evaluating faculty performance to provide them with incentives.

Although the UGC Act established similar guidelines, it has actually succeeded in discouraging creativity and cultural diversity in education after 70 years of operation. Additionally, the bill's provisions grant the central government the authority to remove HECI members for a number of reasons. It also shows how much control the government has regarding the proposed body.

❖ *Fee Fixation:* The bill's meddling with HEIs' fee structures is its most notable feature. The HECI Bill aims to establish standards and procedures for setting fees, even though it is not intended to have jurisdiction over an institution's finances. The regulation of fees, despite being presented under a different name, is essentially the same as what the UGC achieved. Due to UGC's meddling, a number of state public colleges are now offering modest fees (many times lower than the going rate) to all students, regardless of their educational background. As a result, HEIs discovered methods to circumvent the rules by offering self-financed courses, which have drawn criticism for both their caliber and substance from a number of 23 analysts.

❖ *System of accreditation:* The HECI Bill appears to suggest either a change to the current accreditation framework or intentions to restructure the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) along with additional organizations. In any event, considering the nation's history of accreditors, it appears that the HECI, or any other body beneath it (not specifically mentioned in the bill, if NAAC remains under its jurisdiction), has an interest in accrediting universities for standards and quality.

1) Highlights

There will be greater representation in the new body. Prominent bureaucrats from the HRD, skills & entrepreneurship, & science and technology ministries will serve on its board, effectively breaking the HRD ministry's stranglehold on higher education regulation. The central government will appoint the commission's chairwoman, vice chairperson, and twelve members.

2) The necessity of HECI

Numerous committees have criticized the UGC & its regulatory regime for their restrictive procedures. Several committees, including the Yash Pal committee, the National Knowledge Commission, and the Hari Gautam committee, have suggested an all-encompassing education regulator to eliminate bureaucracy and inaction in higher education. UGC was unable to focus on mentoring the institutes, focusing on research to be conducted, etc., since it was still too busy giving money to the institutes.

For improved management of the higher education system. The goal is to encourage consistent improvement in the quality of education at higher education institutions. To guarantee that there is no more meddling in the administration of educational establishments.

3) Important HECI thrust regions

Institutional governance is being downsized. Prioritize enhancing learning outcomes while maintaining academic excellence. Institutions evaluate students' academic performance. HECI will also establish guidelines for the opening and closing of institutions. This process includes mentoring institutions, training teachers, and utilizing technology, among other things. Allow these institutes more latitude and independence." Establish criteria for appointments to important institutional leadership roles.

4) Disapproval

The new body's framework will allow political parties greater influence over education-related decisions. It is an endeavor to strengthen direct government intervention in higher education, from research scholar intake to the admissions process. Additionally, it's unclear if transferring grant-related duties over to the ministry of development will ultimately result in less meddling. Scholars in the field of higher education, not the government, need to have rectified the shortcomings in the UGC's operations.

5) The Way Ahead

It is necessary to consider the future function of the various regulating agencies that are already in place for engineering, medicine, and law. Establish academic standards for every stream while allowing enough latitude to develop new courses and promote interdisciplinary research.

6) Preliminary Information

The Ministry of Human Resource Development oversees the UGC of India, a statutory organization established by the Union government in compliance with the UGC Act 1956. It is responsible for coordinating, establishing, and upholding higher education standards. It recognizes Indian universities and distributes cash to these institutions. It has six regional centres in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Pune, Bhopal, and Kolkata in addition to its headquarters in New Delhi.

VI. EXAMINING THE 2018 HECI BILL

To support expansion and success, consistently performing institutions must receive maximum autonomy as the Indian government seeks to elevate local institutions in international rankings.

The MHRD claims to do its job via the HECI Bill, 2018. The HECI Bill differs from the UGC in several ways, which this brief will address individually, despite having a nearly identical mandate.

A Search-cum-Selection Committee (ScSC): A Search-cum-Selection Committee (ScSC), comprising the Cabinet Secretary, Secretary of Higher Education, and three other distinguished academicians nominated by the current members, will choose the commission's composition and chairperson. The vice chairperson must be appointed the same way as the chairperson, who is a ScSC member. I am indicating this because every member of the ScSC represents the government. This law indicates that the council members from the HECI will be nominated directly through the ministry rather than an independent ScSC, in contrast to the previous UGC Act, which also entailed such nominations of government officials but kept this provision sufficiently unclear. The HECI Bill includes 12 members, including the chairperson and vice chairperson, in contrast to the previous UGC Act. There were ten of these members in UGC. The following individuals will make up the HECI:

- Three representatives of the Central Government: the Secretary of the Department of Sciences and Technology, the Secretary of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, and the Secretary of Education

- There might only be two members within the UGC Act in terms of representation.

- Two additional members are members of the "executive council/governing body" of accreditation bodies, and two more will represent regulatory bodies such as the AICTE and NCTE. Additionally, there are now central government appointments.

- The two additional members are university vice chancellors, who are appointed by the federal or state governments in accordance with the statute for the foundation of any Indian institution. Although the UGC Act also has this clause, the exact quantity is not specified.

- It is suggested that the two remaining members become university professors. Under the previous UGC Act, at least four out of seventeen representatives were university teachers.

- Last but not least, one member is referred to as a "senior member of industry," which is a highly valued initiative; however, the previous UGC Act already included a similar clause.

- At least nine of the twelve members are either direct or indirect officials of the federal government. It is debatable how the HECI will continue to be free from political meddling and how its characteristic limitations won't affect the institutions that fall within its purview and the lowest ranks of HECI management given the government's overrepresentation.

ADVISORY COUNCIL: The Union Minister of HRD will serve as the chair of HECI's Advisory Council. The chairperson or vice-chairperson of each State Council for Higher Education, as well as all HECI members, shall be among its other members. States are only partially represented in this clause. Nevertheless, this council's function is only advisory and non-binding. The bill actually contains no such specific clause, notwithstanding Sophisticated Education Deputy Secretary R. Subrahmanyam's assertion in a newsprint conversation that the council's decisions will be legally obligatory. If passed, the HECI law's contents, unless specifically addressed, will open up opportunities for misuse. In the similar interview, Subrahmanyam added that while the Commission could not feasibly have representatives from all 29 states, the authors of the HECI Performance should have created a different organization rather than referring to it as "advisory." Furthermore, the HECI Bill's membership structure means that the only full-time members who guarantee and supervise the instruction's daily operations are the chairperson & the vice chairperson. The other members are the stewards of significant organizations. It is also unexpected that all the "administration, secretarial, practical, and technical experts" are temporary employees of the HECI. HECI may suffer the same fate as the UGC if its composition is not fixed.

WHY IS IT IN THE NEWS?

The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Act, 2025, is scheduled to be introduced during the next Parliamentary Winter Session. The goal is to make HECI the only body in charge of organizing and setting standards for research, higher education, and scientific and technological institutions across the country. Three current regulators, the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), & the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), will be combined into a single, central organization under the bill. In India, the AICTE is in charge of technical education, the NCTE is in charge of teacher education, and the UGC is in charge of non-technical higher education institutions.

In accordance with NEP, 2020, the projected HECI will be responsible for funding, regulating, accrediting, and establishing academic and professional requirements in higher education at numerous institutions.

The HECI has four verticals: the National Higher Education Governance Council, which oversees all fields except for medical and legal education; the National Accreditation Council, which serves as an accrediting body; the General Education Council, which establishes learning objectives; and the National Higher Education Grants Council, which provides funding. Ensuring that colleges and universities adhere to national academic requirements is known as accreditation oversight. Establishing standards for research quality, curriculum design, and instruction is known as professional standards.

Funding Autonomy: The administrative ministry will continue to handle financial management, keeping funding choices and regulatory supervision apart.

Exclusions and scope limitations: For now, certain professional education sectors, such as law and medical schools, will continue to be governed by the current sectoral regulators rather than falling within HECI's regulatory purview. Reducing regulatory body redundancy and overlapping approvals and processes and bringing uniformity to certification and regulation standards are the objectives of institutional simplification, including streamlining authorizations. Additionally, it streamlines governance for universities across fields.

THE WAY AHEAD

For many years, people have accused the University Grants Commission (UGC) of dishonesty and poor administration of the nation's sophisticated education system. Numerous commissions, committees, analysts, and scholars have suggested methods to reconsider the laws governing higher education in India. However, the country's officials have not been creative or forward-thinking in revamping a regulatory organization whose antiquated nature hindered the expansion of India's developed education structure, as this evaluation of the present HECI Bill demonstrates. The UGC Act necessitated a comprehensive overhaul, not merely minor modifications. The HECI Bill largely mirrors the top-down strategy of the former UGC. The new bill maintains the UGC's major flaws, which include the central government's hegemony, the states' restricted participation, the lack of consideration for financing, and the excessive engagement in an institution's daily operations. The devolution of just the UGC is another aspect to consider.

As was previously mentioned, the existence of several regulators with conflicting goals and values is crucial to the discussion in higher education. Even the recommendations of previous committees, like the Hari Gautam Committee in 2015 and the Yash Pal Committee in 2009, supported the idea of a single, overarching regulator that could eliminate multiple institutional autonomy restrictions and allow HEIs to operate without needless red tape. The HECI Bill suggests doing the opposite. It doesn't explain why the AICTE, NCTE, and ICAR, among other regulators, should keep dividing higher education in India. Prof. Yash Pal himself has emphasized that when disciplines overlap, ideas and creativity emerge. Furthermore, the HECI Bill seems to represent a regression during a period when the country is actively promoting the creation of high-quality multidisciplinary colleges. Before eliminating the UGC and switching the situation with a different supervisory body like the HECI, which cannot adequately represent this revolutionary stage of the nation's higher education, the following important factors must be taken into account:

NEEDS OF THE STUDY: A thorough study is crucial, requiring a detailed analysis of the UGC's achievements and shortcomings. To ensure that all types of institutions, particularly state public institutions, operate smoothly, any new regulator that takes its place should sincerely address every issue. Furthermore, compared to the Hari Gautam Committee Report, the results of such investigations ought to be made public and used by policymakers to correct previous mistakes. Any original act that defines the role of an official should include a section that outlines specific goals and objectives, the purpose of education, and the milestones it aims to reach. A new regulator should aim to transform Indian universities into interdisciplinary hubs where education, research, and skill development occur simultaneously. Without such a structure, educational institutions will simply grow aimlessly and be unable to adequately prepare students for the jobs of the future.

- *Composition for a new regulator:* We should address not only the deficiencies of the UGC, but also all the current regulators in the higher education ecosystem. Establishing an umbrella regulator made up of representatives from each of the current profession-specific regulators could be one way to achieve that. This super regulator's main responsibility will be to supervise other essential supervisory bodies. This supervisory body will only set educational requirements for each profession; it will not interfere with the institutions' finances or operations.

✎ *Empowered along with an independent search committee:* The committee established to choose the executive members of an independent regulator ought to be a separate entity composed of national and international specialists, including scientists, policy experts, and academics with distinguished backgrounds and expertise. Since such an organization must be free from political meddling, its executive body does not require representation from the central government. An impartial entity, such as the Office of the President, should receive reports from both the committee and the new regulator. It may be the only way to keep presidential campaigns, along with special interests, from getting into a sector that can't afford to give in to those kinds of things.

✎ *Representation at the state level:* More statutory offices should be open to all states. The regulator needs to create separate state branches and organize regular meetings and seminars so that all arms can operate together.

✎ *Governance in HECI:* The failure of the body's internal governance structure and its function in overseeing the institutions under it was one of the main causes of UGC's inefficiency. E-systems need to be decentralized at two different levels of governing authority, as well as within the colleges they regulate. The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson may not be the only one in charge of operations; rather, each member should be fully involved in decision-making. This body needs to be free to respond to shifts in the market and implement policy changes without seeking permission from higher authorities. It should operate in the most transparent manner and undergo audits and peer evaluations. Similarly, while supervising the duties of vice chancellors or registrars, this body shall not impede the operations of the institutes. Individual faculty members as well as the executive and administrative bodies of universities should be involved in institutional matters. Our independent universities, like IITs, IIMs, and IISc, which have endured and maintained their quality despite being independent of the government, have a comparable governance structure.

✎ *Accreditation:* NAAC has the ability to become a super accreditor because of its experience in accreditation dating back to 1994. It shall assist and advise both public and private accreditors in evaluating the institutes' overall health. There is currently a conflict of interest because institutions must pay NAAC to be accredited. Rather, private organizations should be permitted to accredit under strict NAAC monitoring and training. Since accreditation also serves as an evaluation of educational quality, university and affiliated college faculty members must participate in ongoing NAAC training.

An institution may request a second check from NAAC or designate another random accreditor for the assignment if it is unhappy with such an accreditation. This will guarantee process transparency.

✎ *Fee regulation:* Some academics are concerned about the arbitrary costs imposed by certain private institutions, which eventually burden the students, even if a regulatory agency shouldn't interfere with an institution's fee system. In this case, state governments have the authority to establish a differential tuition fee aspect for institutions rather than determining the fees themselves. However, they should only establish a maximum after carrying out a comprehensive market analysis of the current courses. It should be reviewed every three years. For students who are economically and socially disadvantaged, scholarships & fee waivers should remain available.

✎ *Finance:* A distinct, independent, and professional organization must be established to distribute need-based funding to all universities and their affiliated colleges without discriminating against any situations or types of institutions. It is preferable for an autonomous institution to begin raising its own money and eventually achieve financial independence in order to become independent. Over time, India's institutions have become less healthy due to an over-reliance on public funds. The system for graded autonomy must be applied, nevertheless, in order to encourage institutions to begin raising funds. The government should support the more capable institutions for infrastructure and research, while the weaker ones should be maintained until they reach that standard of excellence. However, the government must sustain institutions nonetheless, and the extra money they produce must be put to other uses. Additionally, raising funds encourages transparency and competition among institutions, which may ultimately improve their effectiveness and caliber.

VII. CHALLENGES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Over the past ten years, sustainable development has emerged as a major concern for education policy at the state, federal, and international levels. Different stakeholders recognize sustainable development in different ways and look for its results. The following are some particular obstacles to implementing sustainable development in college and university education:

✎ *Financial Challenges:* Industrialization is growing at an accelerated rate, disregarding the environment, people, resources, and nature in the process of the nation's economic growth and development.

It is necessary to raise awareness and help people understand that economic progress cannot be achieved at the expense of the environment and that the economy is a component of the ecosystem.

☙ *Research challenges:* Research challenges include a dearth of studies on higher education and sustainable development. To solve societal issues by fostering relationships between the economy and research institutions, it is imperative to stimulate research on environmental sustainability, higher education, & economic growth and development.

☙ *Cultural Challenges:* Without community support, sustainable development cannot be accomplished. Without public participation, government efforts and policy formulation are insufficient. Higher education must be used as a platform to educate the public about sustainability.

☙ *Social challenges:* Social challenges include population growth, resource waste, and a lack of knowledge about sustainable development, all of which make it more difficult to achieve sustainable development's target. Higher education must educate the people about the scientific underpinnings of sustainability and its advantages.

☙ *Political Challenges:* The main obstacles to achieving the successful execution of sustainable efforts are poor policy implementation, party conflict, a subpar evaluation system, and a lack of information, a lack of funding, a lack of pertinent data, an emphasis solely on economic growth, and a lack of resource conservation.

VIII. PROBLEMS

Since the launch of the University Grants Commission in 1956, there has been a dramatic growth in higher education. The variety of universities has expanded 40–50 times, while the number of students enrolled has multiplied 100 times. The UGC, on the other hand, is also a passive witness to the low quality of education at many of these schools. The "massification of education" demonstrates UGC's inability to uphold quality standards. The country presently boasts 903 universities, 40,026 colleges, and 3.57 crore students, up from 20 institutions, 500 colleges, and 2.1 lakh students in 1956. The proliferation of deemed universities & private colleges without sufficient infrastructure and academic facilities is a significant issue, even though more universities and colleges are desired given the rising demand for education.

1. The aforementioned is one of the main issues facing the education system, according to the proposed National Education Policy.
2. Its policies suffer from two entirely different problems: excessive regulation and insufficient regulation.
3. The bureaucratization of UGC's operations has led to the provision of "one size fits all" answers rather than recommendations for advances in higher education from UGC experts.
4. Attracting foreign faculty to Indian universities has been a glaring failure.
5. UGC had been charged with granting funding in a biased manner.
6. The method for rewarding research has flaws. Instead of peer review and expert evaluation, research is rewarded using the Academic Performance Index, which is based on citations.
7. Autonomous institutions have frequently expressed dissatisfaction over their inability to operate autonomously.

IX. SUGGESTIONS

☙ In order to promote autonomy in hiring, admissions, curriculum, and general operations, India's higher education system must be decentralized and deregulated.

☙ Academic roles require competent executives who are backed by sufficient finance and have had administrative and financial management training.

☙ India needs experts from a variety of sectors, including science and sociology, as well as the arts; thus, it is important to maintain the country's educational diversity. Not everyone has to seek careers in engineering or medicine.

☙ Research and teaching ought to coexist, and teachers and students should be continuously assessed. Thorough reviews must be ensured by independent organizations such as NAAC. MOOCs and Swayam are examples of online courses that might enhance learning, but they shouldn't take the place of conventional classroom training.

☙ India's education system has to produce a qualified workforce in order to keep up with the country's rapid economic growth.

☙ The existing inadequate higher education enrollment level of 25.8% should be improved by revolutionary new educational policies.

X. CONCLUSION

The existing HECI law lacks creativity and is unclear in several ways. It is crucial to make the new print accessible to everyone during policy deliberations in order to have sincere conversations with stakeholders and civil society. The education system must support India's economy, which is currently expanding at one of the fastest rates in the world, by creating a workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge to accelerate this growth. Therefore, new policies must take a progressive and transformative stance. Although the existing HECI Bill appropriately separates the financial and quality control portions of a regulator, much more consideration must be given to guaranteeing its efficacy in the contemporary educational environment. India's enrollment rate in higher education stands at a relatively low 25.8%. If the country wants to raise its higher education to international standards, its policies must be creative and challenge the established quo. It would necessitate the growth of interdisciplinary universities that offer top-notch instruction and research. Adding more regulators for specific specialties won't accomplish the goal of new legislation; instead, it will merely exacerbate the divide.

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