



POLICY RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: LEGISLATION AND ITS CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Education has been considered instrumental in fostering economic development of a country. How well a State promotes and handles the issue of education is a subject of deep study, as the present and future of generations depend largely upon it. Educational policy research is a dynamic and complex field that play a pivotal role in policy analysis, evidence-based policy reforms, identifying gaps, prioritizing issues and deciding government funding for research and development. Policy research in education is intended to generate knowledge about underlying values that shape various educational processes and to develop a better insight of educational practices and their outcomes.

Keywords – Policy Research, Higher Education, Legislation, Challenges in formulation

Introduction

Human population around the world live in different socio-political and cultural environments and their needs and aspiration are very much linked with their present economic state but due to globalization and internationalization, where the entire world is considered as one, the development and change taking place in one region in the world ripple across the globe impacting others. In a world based on science and technology it is education that determine the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people (Report of the Education Commission, 1966). Educational policies profoundly shape economic growth by enhancing productivity through innovation and skill upgradation of human capital. The contemporary global transformation driven by urbanization, industrialization and globalization- is fundamentally the outcome of knowledge creation and systematic application of modern scientific and technological innovations across diverse sectors. This incessant process of development is the result of increase in access to education with equal and equitable distribution of resources among masses. Education is instrumental in empowering individuals, reducing social inequalities and fostering economic development of people. So, education is one such dominant factor which can have substantial impact on economic and social well-being of people and consequently the dynamic relationship between 'Polity' and 'Education' within a country is crucial. How appropriately a *State* promotes and handles the subject of 'Education' is clearly reflected in its policies (public policy), whose outcome largely decide the present and future of generations.

Research Objectives - The present paper enquires into the relevance of policy research prior to the process of legislation and presents a framework to understand the various models of policy research in the field of education, with special emphasis on the status of policy research in higher education in India. It also analyzes the policy framework governing India's higher education sector and examines the challenges in policy creation and implementation in higher education in India. The evidences are collected from various policy documents and secondary resources after their thorough analysis and systematically organized to reach to valid conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

A public policy may be defined as a purposive course of action taken or adopted by those in power such as government bodies and officials, in pursuit of certain goals or objectives (Sapru, 2009). It can be in the form of government laws, regulations, court decisions and local ordinances. In other countries of the world where diversity in regions and languages are less known to exist, it is quite easy to adopt a policy which can be uniformly applicable. However, in India where diversity manifests in multiple forms such as regional, linguistic and cultural variations, it is challenging

for a single policy to be universally applicable. Therefore, research before formulation of policy is important for successful implementation and attainment of objectives.

At the time of independence, the subject of education was a State subject in India which was retained by the Constitution of India after 1950. After the 42nd constitutional amendment it was transferred to the concurrent list which means that both Union and State are collectively responsible on the issue of education from primary to university level. While the role and responsibility of state government is an implementation body, the Union government accepted the responsibility of strengthening the national character of education and making checks and balances to safeguard its quality. Union becomes supreme over states in enforcement of laws regarding education.

An important aspect of educational development post-independence is to make a blueprint of a national system of education relevant to the life needs and aspirations of the people with emphasis on liquidation of illiteracy and compulsory elementary education for all. In order to advise the Government in the formulation and implementation of policies and program on the issue of education, a number of commissions and specialized committees had been set up in the past, such as University Education Commission in 1947-48 was formulated to give recommendations on university education, Kothari Commission (1964) gave many valuable suggestions on the development of education. Along with the National Policy on Education 1986, the key policy framework in higher education include the UGC Act (1956), AICTE Act (1987), Rashtriya Uchathar Shiksha Abhiyan (2013) and the latest NPE-2020.

A brief summary of Key Policy Framework in Higher Education-

The University Education Commission (1948-49) - The commission was appointed with the prime objective to study the functioning of universities in the country and to investigate into the immediate problems of university education in India. The commission redefined the aims and objectives of university education to meet out the expectation of country and to highlight the role and responsibility of universities in national development.

The UGC Act (1956)- The act laid down standards for teaching, examination and disbursement of grants to universities and higher education institutions.

The Education Commission (1964-66)- The education commission was appointed in response to the continuous demand to prepare a *blueprint* of a programme of national system of education and to execute it carefully at the ground keeping time constraint. Its objective was “to advise government on the *national pattern of education* and on general principles for the development of education at all stages and in all its aspects.” The development programme as proposed by the education commission was centred around three priority areas- A radical improvement in quality and standards of higher education and research; Expansion of higher education to meet the manpower needs of national development and to some extent, the rising social ambitions and expectations of people; and Improvement of university organization and administration.

National Policy on Education (1986) - The education policy of 1986 emphasized on better consolidation of resources available and set up directives to modernize various programmes and systems so as to equip higher education with necessary dynamism and to protect the system from degradation.

AICTE Act (1987) – The act was passed by Parliament in 1987 to establish a statutory body with a view to properly coordinate development of technical education system throughout the country. It regulates and gives approval to technical education colleges, covers programmes of technical education including training and research in Engineering, Technology, Management, Pharmacy, Applied Arts and Crafts etc.

Yashpal Committee Report (2009)- To review the role of statutory bodies like UGC and AICTE in the context of changes in the higher, technical and professional education in the country, the government of India constituted a review committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Yashpal who was the former chairman of UGC. Later on, the committee was renamed as “Rejuvenation and Renovation of Higher Education” whose objective was to find out irregularities in the higher education as whole and to suggest measures to eliminate those aberrations. The committee deeply studied the various aspects of higher education and identified the challenges and obstacles which were preventing the universities to perform excellently.

RUSA (2013) - Rastriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions. The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state’s strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.

NEP-2020 - The policy envisages a complete restructuring of the education system to deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion, to all young people who aspire for it. It focuses on holistic reforms, multidisciplinary nature of higher education, flexible curriculum, ‘light but tight’ regulation.

Meaning of Policy Research

The term research covers a wide range of activities, from carefully controlled scientific treatment studies undertaken by individual scholars in universities and other specialized institutions to analysis of data for particular administrative or political purposes to arguments for specific policy positions that may be more or less well grounded in evidence. Here in the present paper research is limited to all those activities, either personalized or institutionalized undertaken in the process of policy formulation and implementation. The educational researches conducted in humanities and social sciences prove to be beneficial to guide policy makers and educational practitioners in the matters of pedagogy and its practice. The type of research conducted in the context of policy include (i) surveys to collect information on *status quo* and prepare a database for reference in decision making, (ii) experimental researches to produce evidence based studies to resolve controversies, (iii) conduct developmental studies to study the effect of programs over a period of time and to make comparison of feasibility of same policy on different populations at the same time (iv) evaluation and collection of feedback for the purpose of documentation.

Planning and proper implementation of policies and programs are essentially important in transforming the vision and idea of the *State* into action. Policy research can be a problem-solving activity in identifying various problematic areas in the education system and also an important tool for the evaluation of efficacy of different policies measures for solving those deficiencies

Policy Research in Education: The World View

Almost all societies in the world depending upon their stage of evolution adopt certain measures in the management of their public affairs and to ensure smooth functioning of their sub-systems. Policy research is one of the several contributing factors in policy formulation and implementation. Weiss (1977), reviewing the contribution of social research to public policy, argued that research has only a limited influence in decision making. It is one of the several inputs to the complicated decision-making process of policy making. Policy research in education is intended to generate knowledge about various developmental issues, considering their relative importance in the context of national development. It also helps to find out suitable applications to work out the problems in the field of education. There are some national bodies which conduct educational policy-based research from time to time and submit their finding to the Government of India. The National University of Educational Planning and Administration is one such body which assists the MHRD in its efforts to improve educational planning and administration in the country. Another apex body in higher education is the UGC which assists the State and Central universities for advance training and research. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Indian Council of Science and Research (ICSR) are other few institutions which carry out research activities in their respective fields in a scientific manner.

In United Kingdom the system of government is known as devolution which allows decisions to be made at a more local level. The issues are included either in devolved matters or reserved matters. The subject of education and training is included in the devolved list category and Scottish Parliament can make laws pertaining to education in UK. In the UK there are several examples of devolved government including: the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Greater London Authority (Mayor of London and London Assembly). Some issues remain the express responsibility of the UK Parliament alone. These are known as reserved matters. There is no single government body dealing with policy legislation in higher education. The Institutions of Higher Education in UK are independent and self-governing bodies empowered by a Royal Charter or an Act of Parliament to develop. Moreover, the institutions of higher education especially the universities do not welcome state interference in their governance as they fear to lose their autonomy in return.

In American Constitution education is not a federal responsibility, the federal role in education is strictly limited by the US Constitution and by federal statutes and hence there is a complete decentralization of educational responsibilities. Guided by the belief of limited government and wherever possible locally controlled government, each state in America is responsible for governing its public institutions. America and the other third world developed countries believe in non-nonsense and realist philosophy. The principles and beliefs are not accepted without any strong base but their usefulness is tested with time and circumstances. Thus, nothing is prior, and keeps on evolving with time and need of the market which is considered an external driving force in American higher education. Thus, there is continuous evaluation of policies to remove redundancy and add fresh measures to satisfy present state of higher education. The institutions of higher education, in order to secure freedom from state policies and regulations are asking for less government support in educational expenditures. Moreover, market is providing finance for educational expenditures in return of more programs, activities and researches in disciplines which have strong market value like agricultural sciences, engineering, management etc.

Policy Formulation

Policy framing and implementation by the government is a matter extensive study and discussion. Policy legislation involves participation of various agencies directly or indirectly. The role of governmental agencies like cabinet, political parties, state governments, bureaucrats is direct whereas non-governmental agencies like media, individual experts, NGO's, pressure groups etc. is indirect in public policy formulation. The social, political, economic conditions of the country are also crucial players in policy formulation.

In India the Department of Higher Education, under Ministry of Education (previously called MHRD) is responsible for framing policies and planning for overall development of the higher education system. The problems or the issues are raised by various agencies mentioned above and supported by various political parties. New policies emerged out of the areas of concerns raised by political parties in their proposals. These issues are necessarily the popular ones so as to entice voters during election. Once the election is over and the elected government takes charge, the process of policy formulation is initiated. Public policy formulation involves four main stages-

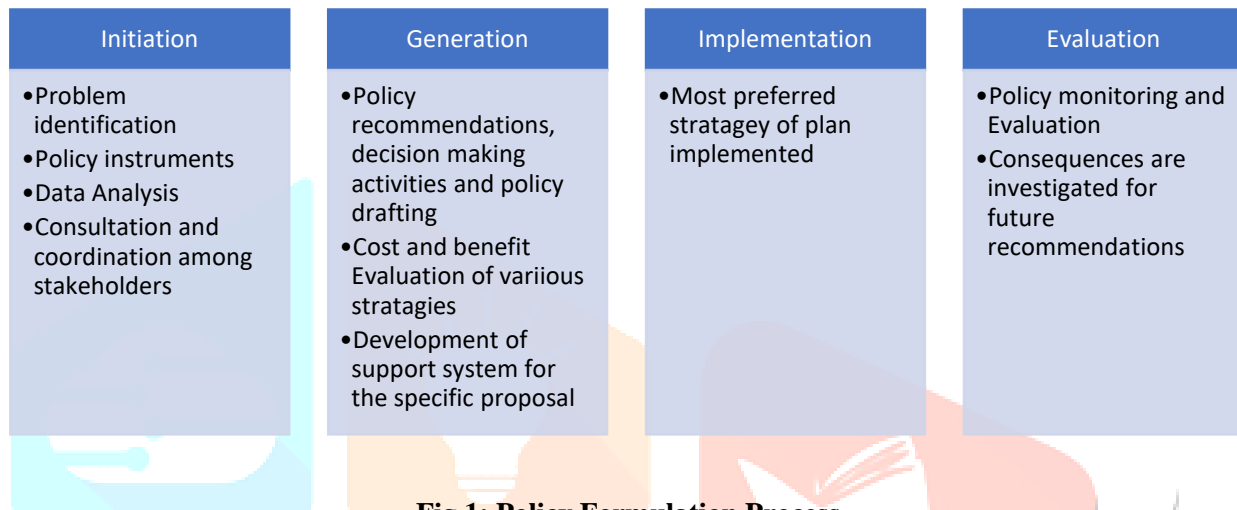


Fig 1: Policy Formulation Process

Policy research process can be initiated before policy formulation or after policy implementation depending upon the nature, scope and purpose, target groups, distribution of costs and benefits and policy impact. There are various approaches exist for policy analysis. Generally, in educational policy and social science studies, the *analysis for policy* is practiced which refers to research conducted for actual policy development, often commissioned by policy makers inside the bureaucracy. Another approach is *analysis of policy* which is undertaken by academic researchers and think tank researchers to seek the purpose of a particular policy at a particular time and assess the effects when the policy gets implemented.

In India policy making is overtaken by the political will of the ruling regime. The members nominated in the drafting committee of a new bill bear different expertise, such as technical and knowledge experts, educationists, social scientist, economists, political leaders etc. The stakeholders represent diverse political perspectives, and have serious political affiliation along with expedient qualifications. At times a raw skeleton or points is prepared by the bureaucrats in the ministries who have long experience working in that area and suggestions are invited revolving those points. In that case new points do not surface up and the old ones are inherited in the new policy. The final draft is then sent for discussion in Parliament. Here the political equation within the parliament plays a major role. Consensus is arrived at unanimously on all the points under consideration if there is single party in majority. But the policy might not be truly representative. In the case of coalition government, there are certain points of disagreement on which further discussion is reserved but the final draft would be more representative as it has been agreed upon by majority of members, belonging to different political parties and following different ideologies. In the former case the political agenda of ruling party is reflected in the final policy whereas in the latter case, there is an amalgamation of political thoughts and the original spirit of the bill is modified for the better.

Challenges in India's policy making process in present system

India slipped 2 positions and ranked 41st (out of 69 nations) in the IMD Global Competitiveness Rankings 2025, which provides a benchmark for each year's progress on different factors and institutions that are significant for future growth. Higher education & training and Innovations are the two sub-indexes among those twelve on which the competitiveness is measured. The global competitiveness score of a country is a reflection of how well the public policies of that country are serving to bring changes for better and it also helps to keep the stakeholders accountable for the effective functioning of government policies. India is a developing economy and it needs global market for its sustenance and growth in

various sectors, in that case such policy models are required which suit the needs within and to go well with the expectations globally. This calls for validation of policies at several stages to prevent any inconsistencies to creep in and therefore before arriving at final stage a policy undergoes many channels and stages, each of which is important and unique. Still this does not guarantee 100 % success rate for any policy and policy failure incidences occur.

A policy does not fail completely but it becomes a slow achiever due to the presence of unwanted problems. The challenges are basically the weaknesses that quietly enter at various stages of policy framing. Policy makers are many times fully aware of the weak points but are unable to do what they *should* be doing due to stringency of resources. Following are some conspicuous stumbling blocks in policy making-

- a. Policy model /framework- The policy is based upon those assumptions which are unrealistic and impracticable i.e. the policy model is developed hastily without proper review and research.
- b. Implementation Gaps – The constituent elements i.e. what ought to be there in policy is crystal clear but the mode of action to achieve the desired outcomes is not properly dealt.
- c. Institutional Structure deficit - The government machinery should be flexible enough to accommodate various feature of new policy (emerging out of old policy) for its effective implementation and feedback. The government institutional setup is rigid and resistant to change. It is very difficult to bring changes in the pre-established institutions. Moreover, inadequate physical infrastructure involving digital and internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas is another reason for failure of good policies. Thus, due to this inadaptability of government machinery, the actual policy objectives are modified to fit into the old structure and as a result the desired outcomes are diluted or not at all achieved.
- d. Lack of Human capital – Every policy has a humane element involved in it. Success of any policy depends largely on the people who really work for its implementation. There is no proper attention given to guiding and training of personnel involved in execution and hence they lack the skills to put the policy in practice effectively.
- e. Role of State- In democratic countries there are several social and cultural groups representing diverse interest of institutions which sometimes is responsible for creating conflicting situations in societies. Pluralist conceptions of modern state emphasize on policies reflecting majority views in society. In such system political parties and other pressure groups play a major role, these organisations are representatives of diverse sections of society and who voice the views of these interest groups in government. The extent to secure the objectives of various interest groups decide the power of these organisations and ultimately political decision are motivated by the influence of these political organisations in a democratic process.
- f. Lack of Political Consensus – In India absence of consensus among political parties create hindrances in policy formulation and implementation.
- g. Diversity and Complexity – India's extra ordinary cultural, linguistic and socio-economic heterogeneity presents unique challenges as policies effective in one region may not prove to be successful in another region.
- h. Time period of implementation- The government in power has a fixed time period to perform, usually five years. Sometimes theorizing the policy takes too much time that by the time the implementation occurs, the government at the centre changes. The newly formed policy did not get ample time for implementation and evaluation. The new government conceives the policy with their view point, evaluates the previous policy which as usual was unable to deliver desired outcomes due to time restraint and put forward a different set of objectives. So, in the tedious process of framing the policy, the time and the money spent goes in vain and again a new cycle of policy formulation starts.

Conclusion

To meet out the current and future problems in higher education sector in India, demands for good governance and apt policies. The policies formulated must be analyzed to keep the mandates of Access, Equity, Quality, Quantity and Skill development in order to reserve India's stand in global competition in consideration with national and local needs. Other Programmes and Schemes like National Research Professorship (NPR) should be promoted to honor distinguished academicians for their outstanding contribution in their respective field and are still capable of productive research. Despite ambitious policy announcements, the process of policy formulation and implementation suffers from inadequate resources, implementation gaps, inefficient system and weak supervision and evaluation system. Good governance and effective administrative system can definitely help in successful and groundbreaking policy.

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