

Internationalization and India's New Education Policy

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While the waves of globalization seem to be receding, the call for internationalization is on the rise. Many countries view internationalization as a strategy to gain academic credibility and increase the global competitiveness of national education systems. Internationalization implies cross-border mobility of programs, students, institutions, and faculty. Cross-border mobility is guided by economic rationales and mediated through market processes.

This article argues that India's efforts to internationalize higher education do not seem to be motivated by market processes, but by a wish to extend its soft power and increase the country's global role. The New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) reflects this perspective and prioritizes internationalization in order to promote Indian education abroad and facilitate the establishment of foreign higher education institutions in India.

India's Approach to Internationalization: Main Turning Points

During the postindependence period, Indian development strategy emphasized political sovereignty and economic self-reliance. The latter implied technological self-reliance, as reflected by the establishment of higher education institutions of technology. India relied on external funding and expertise to establish the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), and on educating its nationals abroad to train the first generation of teachers in higher education. For instance, while IIT Bombay received help from the former Soviet Union, IIT Madras and IIT Delhi were established with the support of former West Germany and the United Kingdom, respectively.

India offers around 3,940 scholarships every year through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) to foreign students from about 140 countries to promote cultural understanding, and has signed cooperation agreements within the field of education with 54 countries. Yet it has taken the country decades to issue a clearly articulated policy on internationalization. Two earlier national policies on education (NEP 1968 and NEP 1986) were relatively silent on this issue. An internationalization strategy was articulated for the first time when the University Grants Commission (UGC) introduced a program for the "Promotion of Indian Higher Education Abroad" (PIHEAD) in 2002. This proposal was shelved, since the Task Force of 2004 did not wish to see the Indian higher education system subjected to global competition under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) framework. The UGC plan for internationalization of 2009 was also constrained with respect to internationalization, for lack of legislative measures. A bill seeking permission for foreign education providers to establish campuses in India was presented in parliament in 2010. This bill did not pass either.

NEP 2020 is the first national policy that gives priority to internationalization. Its vision is for India to become a global study destination and an education hub to attract international students. In a major shift in policy orientation, NEP 2020 recommends the establishment of branch campuses by top-ranking foreign universities (from among the top 100 in world university rankings).

NEP 2020 also envisages highly performing Indian universities setting up branch campuses abroad. Many private Indian universities already have branch campuses in a number of countries. According to the Cross-Border Education Research Team's latest international campus listing, Indian institutions have branch campuses in countries such as Australia, Mauritius, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan. Thanks to NEP 2020, select public and private institutions may also establish a presence abroad from now on. Regulations introduced by the UGC in January 2021 allow the category of "Institutions of Eminence Deemed to be Universities" to establish

Abstract

Internationalization of higher education in India seems to be motivated more by efforts to extend its soft power and increase its global role than by market mediation for revenue generation. The New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) encourages foreign education institutions to establish a presence in India and recommends setting up Indian institutions abroad.

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foreign campuses with the approval of the government. The liberalization of regulations on branch campuses and stimulation of credit transfer possibilities (between Indian institutions and institutions abroad) emphasized in NEP 2020 will help increase student flows to and from India.

Expectations vs. Reality

The NEP 2020 condition that India will only welcome branch campuses from top-ranking institutions may act as a constraint against expanding the scope of institutional mobility to India. Informal discussions with officials at some top-ranking institutions indicate that only a few are keen to establish campuses in India, for several reasons. First, they are likely to continue to focus their efforts on retaining, if not improving, their place in global rankings. Second, their decision would be driven by the profitability of investments: There is a need for more clarity on their authority to decide the level of student fees. Third, legal provisions regarding repatriation of income generated by foreign providers are still unclear. Fourth, many of these institutions are welcoming Indian students in their home campuses, with a financial benefit that is arguably higher than what they would levy in India with a branch campus.

How will the provisions in the policy affect student flows? According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 375,055 Indian students were studying abroad in 2018. Their motivation for studying abroad is highly influenced by poststudy employment opportunities in host countries. Hence, their favorite study destinations are the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. They make a calculation between the high cost of their studies and potential high returns. A degree from a foreign branch campus located in India may not satisfy their aspirations for poststudy employment and high returns on investments.

Are the NEP 2020 recommendations likely to help India emerge as a higher education hub? India hosts currently around 47,000 international students, mostly from South Asia and Africa. Many of them are attracted to India because of access to better quality education than at home, at a low cost. But India does not provide many employment opportunities and when provided, the salary is not very attractive. In other words, the economic logic that guides Indian students going abroad may not be a reliable framework by which to understand the logic of foreign students coming to India.

India is aspiring to play a global role and education may be a supporting sector in that process. Therefore, India has been making serious efforts in recent years to increase the flow of inbound international students by extending scholarships under the "Study in India" program launched in 2018. India plans to host nearly 500,000 international students by 2024, 10 percent among them on attractive government scholarships. The provision of scholarships is an indication of India's interest to play a global role.

Another area envisaged in NEP 2020 is the promotion of research collaborations and faculty exchanges between Indian and foreign institutions. India launched a Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) in 2018, to strengthen academic and research collaborations with select countries. Another program, the Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN), was successful in attracting more than 1,283 scholars from 56 countries to Indian higher education institutions between 2015 and 2019. These collaborations are seen as reliable and sustainable ways to promote internationalization.

Conclusion

To fulfil its vision, India needs to put in place legislative measures and incentives to attract institutions and students. While its large diaspora, especially in Gulf countries, is a good source of demand for international education, the country will be able to develop into an education hub only when attracting a sizeable number of international students from a diverse range of countries. While market-mediated, cross-border mobility may not work in favor of India, government initiatives such as extending scholarships may be an effective measure. Further, online courses through India's MOOC platforms such as SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) may also have the potential to attract foreign students in large numbers. Needless to say, COVID-19 has considerably stimulated online learning among students in India and abroad. This is a new reality on which India can capitalize. ▲

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