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Present Scenario of Higher Education in Nadia District, West Bengal: An Overview

[1] Payel Ghosh, [2] Suvendu Ray

[1] PG Student, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India
[2] Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: **Suvendu Ray**

Abstract

It has been seventy-six years since India became independent. The Indian higher education system has undergone significant growth and transformation over the years, playing a crucial role in shaping the nation's intellectual capital and driving economic development. The purpose of the present study is to state the present scenario of the higher education system in Nadia district of West Bengal and compare the existing higher education framework with the National Education Policy-2020. The researcher has conducted a documentary analysis method to accomplish the set goals. In the findings, the researcher has drawn an overview of the background and development of higher education in Nadia district from the perspective of West Bengal. This paper also highlighted the key challenges in higher education faced by students, teachers, and the community. The findings of the present study will help to learn about the development of higher education in Nadia, West Bengal as well as the challenges in higher education, which can be significant for policymakers and future researchers in the field.

Introduction

Education is expected to affect or condition the social behaviour of the person being educated (Adesemowo and Sotonade, 2022) [1]. Education is a cumulative process of development of intellectual abilities, Skills and attitudes, all of which form our various outlooks and dispositions to action in life generally (Bamisaiye, 1989) [2]. Higher Education System provides innovative skills to the graduates, to help transformation of the society from backward to modern economy through quality teaching, research and innovation (Fatima, *et al.*, 2020) [3]. Higher education has experienced a rapid spurt in development over the past two decades, which can be extrapolated to be primarily driven due to measures initiated by the private sector (Menon, *et al.*, 2014) [4].

India is a democratic country where equality of opportunity is guaranteed to the citizens (Ray and Ghanta, 2022) [5] which have the world's third largest higher education sector, behind the United States and China (Sharma, *et al.*, 2020) [6]. Higher education in India faces six types of challenges related to equity each associated with gender, caste, interstate, religion, spatial, and income (Joshi and Ahir, 2019) [7]. India also has around 250 specialists teaching and research institutions, established to provide training in such areas as medicine, engineering, agriculture, and computer science, and to conduct high-level research (Jayaram, 2004) [8]. The Planning Commission of India sets the broad parameters for the funding of Indian higher education, while the University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible or distributing resources and promoting reforms. The UGC also has a role in the processes of coordination, accreditation and quality control (Rizvi and Gorur, 2011) [9].

West Bengal is the eighth-most populous country subdivision in the world, the fourth-most populous state in India, and the thirteenth-largest state in terms of area. The State of West Bengal has had a great legacy of higher education in India (Jana, 2017) [10]. Higher education can really be natured as 'national' rather than 'regional' and the growth of higher education in West Bengal (Ray, 2021) [11]. West Bengal has consistently excelled in the field of higher education. The University of Calcutta, one of the first universities, was founded there in 1857. The number of institutions has currently expanded substantially. West Bengal has four different types of universities. Central, State, Deemed, and State Private are these. The Central Government provides funding to central universities. The state government oversees the operation of state universities. According to Section 3 of the UGC Act of 1956, Deemed Universities have the authority to grant degrees and handle their own administrative tasks.

Nadia is a historical Sanskrit learning centre and one of West Bengal's oldest districts. Nadia is an inseparable part of the religious and cultural history of the state. Average literacy rate in Nadia district as per census 2011 is 85.35 % of which males and females are 88.95 % and 81.63 % literates respectively. Therefore, the researchers have framed a question to investigate the current state of higher education in West Bengal's Nadia district.

Objectives of the Study:
 The researcher has framed some objectives in the present study as follows:
1. To examine the background of higher Education in the perspectives of West Bengal.
2. To assess the present scenario of higher education in Nadia District, West Bengal.
3. To find out the key challenges in higher education.
4. To compare between existing higher education framework with National Education Policy-2020.

Method of the Study:
A documentary-analysis method has been conducted to accomplish the purposes of the present study (Ray and Sikdar, 2023) [12]. Documentary analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009) [13]. It is also a qualitative study based on qualitative data viz. various authentic documents, reports and empirical studies.

Findings of the Study:
Researchers have also examined the data and provided a chronological description of the findings in accordance with the study's goals.

Background of Higher Education in the Perspective of Nadia, West Bengal:
It is difficult to identify Nadia, a rural village, a quiet shade in the rich context of ancient historical material of District 24 Parganas. The meaning of the word 'Nadia' is given in the book Names of 'Villages of West Bengal' written by Amiya Kumar Banerjee Island in Sanskrit originally means 'land surrounded by water on both sides', 'Nabadwip is a new island' (Chattopadhyay, 2020) [14].
Higher Education in Ancient period: There were tolls where the guru mashie taught and the disciple accepted. There was no cost for teaching in the 'Toll' or 'Chatusparties' and the 'Guru Griha' provided food and accommodation for the students. (Mallick, 1910) [15] As in the Vedic period of education, students had to spend their time in 'Guru Grihas'. There were many toll booths in Shantipur too. Kalimoy Ghatak Pal Chowdhury, the author of 'Ranaghat's charitta stock book', used Tolls. Darka Nath Chatushpati was a 'Toll' of Ramachandra Bagish in Palpara of Chakda Thana of Ashwinikumar Vidhratna on the banks of Churni river. (Chattopadhyay, 2020) [16].
Higher Education in medieval period: The glory of medieval Nabadwip spread across the country. For several centuries, this Nabadwip was the birthplace of the sages of Bengal who were revered throughout India. History of Nyaya practice in Bengal in fact, if this history of 'Nabadwipa Vidya' practice was taught, people from all over India would come to Nabadwip for Sanskrit education. Stone Panshila Suvarna Vihara and Shimlaiya in Nabadwip

were the heart of Buddhist culture. From the 14th century, Nabadwip became the centre of Sanskrit practice. (Bandhopadhya, 2020) [17]. From Shulpani, Gopendu Bhushan and Shankha Teertha became the beacon of Sanskrit practice. Students from different states of India used to come to Nabadwip. Krittivas Ojha, the first translator of Ramayana in Bengal and the first poet of Bengali literature, was born on the land of Nadia (Phulia in Shantipur), Deenbandhu Mitra, the author of the legendary drama Nildarpan, was born in Chauberia, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, classmate of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, social reformer and teacher Madanmohan Tarkalankar was born in Bilgagram, Nadia. Play writter Dwijendralal Roy, legendary actor Soumitra Chattopadhyay was born.
Higher Education in British period: The British district of Nadia was formed in 1787. The present district of Nadia after partition was formed by Notification No. 545-GA dated 23rd February, 1948. The district of Nadia is bounded on the north and north-west by the district of Murshidabad. Europeans from various nations began travelling to India for trading purposes in the last quarter of the 15th century. Numerous institutions and universities were founded across the nation. The Engineering College at Roorkee was created by Lord Dalhousie, and the Medical College of Calcutta was founded by Lord William Bentinck's. The universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were founded in 1857.
The number of institutions rose rapidly from 4 universities & 67 colleges educating 600 students in 1882 to 14 universities, 167 colleges, with 46,000 students in 1922. the Madras Medical College (1835) imparted education to women for the medical benefits to be given to female population who would otherwise feel shy in getting treated by male doctors. Punjab University was established in 1878. St. Xavier's College in Calcutta was founded in 1860. Foreman College in Lahore was founded in 1864. Red College, Lucknow, in 1877. St. Stephen's College in Delhi was founded in 1882. As a result, there were 72 colleges by 1882, up from 23 in 1854 (Bansal, 2017) [18]. The sudden increase in people interested in attending university was one of the immediate effects of the founding of the three universities in 1857. From 162 in 1857 to 2778 in 1882, more candidates who passed the university entrance exam. In order to meet this rising demand, more government colleges were founded. From 27 colleges in 1857 to 75 colleges in 1882, there were increases in the number of colleges. 51 new colleges were added over the course of the following 20 years. British India had 126 colleges in total as of 1901-02. The only duties of universities, which remained affiliating bodies, were to administer exams and control admission.
Higher Education in Independent India: A 3-year degree programme was recommended by the Sergeant model of education, which is still widely used today. In 1951, the five-year plan was initiated. The first education five-year plan covered the years (1951-56). Currently, the 13th Five-Year Plan is in effect as of 2017 to 2022 (Japee and Oza, 2021) [19]. The institutional framework of higher education in India is complex. There are several types of institutions: universities, colleges, institutions of national importance, post-graduate institutions and polytechnics. In general, degrees can only be awarded by universities. The institutions of national importance have been given permission to award degrees by special acts of Parliament. Diplomas may be awarded by post-graduate institutions and

polytechnics, which must be approved by the All-India Council of Technical Education. State universities, central universities, deemed universities (aided and unaided), and private universities are the four types of universities (Chakrabarti, 2007) [20]. Everything has changed in the modern era of large universities like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), including student living standards, curricula, and overall development (Ghonge, *et al.,* 2020) [21].

**The Present Scenario of Higher Education in Nadia District, West Bengal:**
As per the Census India 2011, Nadia district has population of 5167600 of which 2653768 are males and 2513832 are females. Nadia is one of district of West Bengal in India. There are 18 Taluks, 1308 villages and 67 towns in Nadia district. In Nadia 3 universities are found and their details with 22 affiliated colleges. All these Universities are recognised and approved by 'University Grants Commission (UGC).
The total literacy rate of Nadia district was 74.97% in 2011 which is less than average literacy rate 77.08%% of West Bengal. Population-wise, out of total 3,480,555 literates, males were 1,878,866 while females were 1,601,689. Female literacy percentage 63.72% and male 70.8%.

**Table 1:** Total Number of Higher Education Institute (University) in Nadia, West Bengal

University type	west Bengal	Nadia
Central university	1	0
State university	37	3
Deemed university	2	0
Private university	10	0

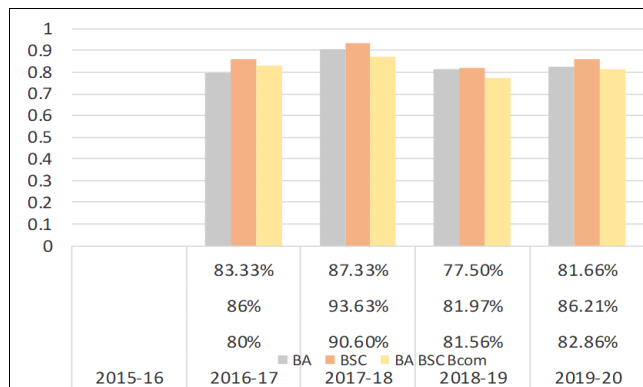**Source:** UGC consolidated list of all university 25.01.2023 [22]
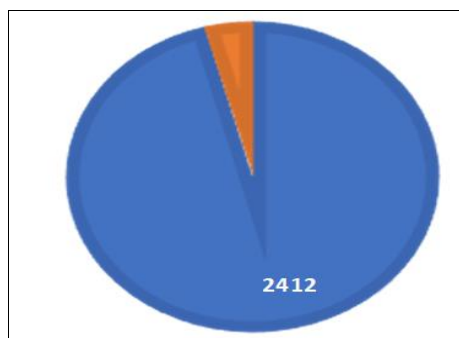
Source: West Bengal government [23]

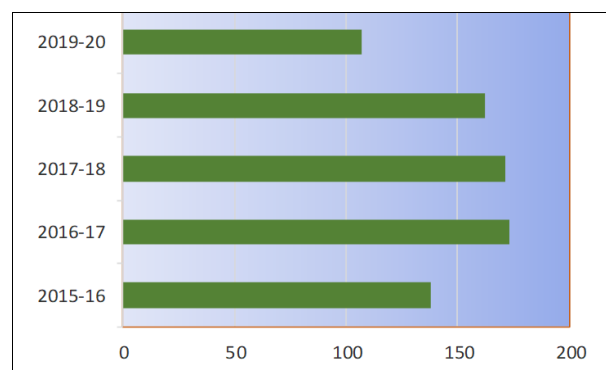**Fig 1:** Total Number of Higher Education Institute (College) in Nadia District, West Bengal
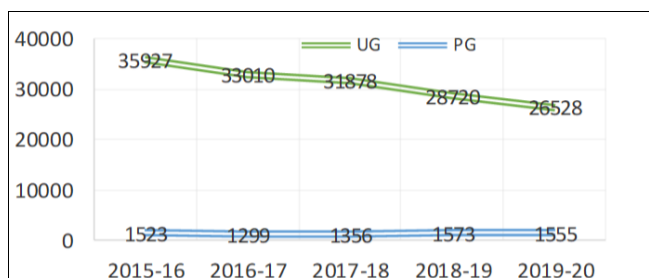
Source: University IQAS Report [24]

Fig 2: UG & PG student Enrolment 2015-2020 in Nadia District, West Bengal

Source: University IQAS Report [24]

Fig 3: UG and PG Student progress 2015-2020 in Nadia District, West Bengal

Source: University IQAS Report [24]

Fig 4: Ph. D. Enrolment 2015-2020 in Nadia District, West Bengal

The Key Challenges in Higher Education in Nadia District, West Bengal:
India still faces stern challenges in higher education (Sheikh, 2017) [25]. Education system of India was fully affected for last two years due to covid-19 pandemic (Maity, *et al.,* 2022) [26]. Poor student employment rates, a poor track record of winning awards and recognition at the national level, a poor share of research funding, etc. The situation of state public universities, which produce more than 90% of India's graduates, is even worse (Anonymous, 2020) [27].
Enrolment problem: India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is only 15%, which is very low when compared to develop and other developing nations. The number of higher education institutions available is not enough to meet the nation's rising demand due to the increase in school enrolment (Sheikh, 2017) [28].
Supply-Demand Gap: The standards-maintaining city of New Delhi promotes and coordinates open and distance learning (ODL) activities in India. The boundaries of higher education are expected to be expanded like never before by distance learning using new information and communication technologies (ICT). This is so that students don't have to leave their homes or places of employment and the cost is reduced by 66%. It is being used to advance the cause of distance education to use the internet and satellite technology (Gupta and Gupta, 2012) [29].
Equity and Excellence: On the basis of its findings, the concerned ministry has de-recognised 44 deemed Universities. Due to its poor quality, these educational institutes are not up to mark at global standard (Jaysawal

and Saha, 2023) [30]. The main problem facing the Indian higher education system is to ensure equal access to high-quality education throughout the whole nation. Students in rural, semi-urban, and metropolitan areas are more likely to be concerned about this since they also want to be able to participate in the new economic revolution. When developing policies to increase access to higher education, the twin concerns of inclusion and equity need to be accorded the weight they deserve. In order to give students from underprivileged or vulnerable groups of society equitable opportunities, imbalances—whether related to gender, caste, religion, or regionality—must be corrected. Thus, several social, economic and political reasons seem to act as constraints to access and equity in higher education in India. Enhancing social access as well as to bring equity in quality of higher education is still important in the country (Goel and Walia, 2015) [31].

Lack of Regulation: In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), through its principal regulatory organisation, the Universities Grants Commission, is in charge of overseeing the operation of every university (UGC). The All-India Council for Technical Education is another government agency in charge of regulating technical education (AICTE). There are two quality assessment bodies, namely National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBC). AICTE and UGC are responsible for providing guidelines for all academic and academic administration related issues (Kakkar, 2017) [32].

The foundation of India's existing higher education system is regulators' profound and widespread scepticism of universities' ability to operate properly and autonomously. The current system, which requires that universities follow the laws, rules, regulations, guidelines, and policies established by the government and regulatory bodies, has not yielded the best outcomes.

Research and Innovation: The majority of research scholars lack fellowships or do not receive them in a timely manner, which negatively impacts their research in one way or another. Additionally, there is a poor connection between Indian higher education institutions and research centres. Consequently, this presents yet another difficulty for India's higher education system (Sheikh, 2017) [33]. For comparison, the nations that spent the most on science and technology as a percentage of their GDP were Israel (5.11%), Sweden (4.27%), Japan (3.11%), South Korea (2.95%), the United States (2.77%), Germany (2.74%), and France (2.27%). China (1.54%), Russia (17.4%), the United Kingdom (1.88%), and Brazil (1.04%) are among the nations that have spent more than India (Decker, 2014) [34].

Inadequate facilities and infrastructure: The majority of colleges and universities in India lack both basic and advanced research facilities. Numerous institutions operate without adequate infrastructure and fundamental amenities like libraries, hostels, transportation, sports facilities, etc., which are needed to rank the best institutions (Sharma and Sharma, 2015) [35].

Institutions both governmental and private run concurrently in India. In India, private universities provide 50% of all higher education, much of it at a high cost and without government funding (Perez, *et al.,* 2017) [36].

Compare between Existing Higher Education Framework with National Education Policy-2020:
NPE 1986 was formulated by the Indian government to advance and oversee education in India before NEP 2020, which the Indian Union Cabinet launched on July 29, 2020 (Mahanta, 2023) [37]. The universal pre-kindergarten through secondary education outlined in the NEP 2020 plan includes a 50% GER target for the following ten years. However, NPE 1986 predicts that by 2018, enrolment in higher education will increase to 26.3%.
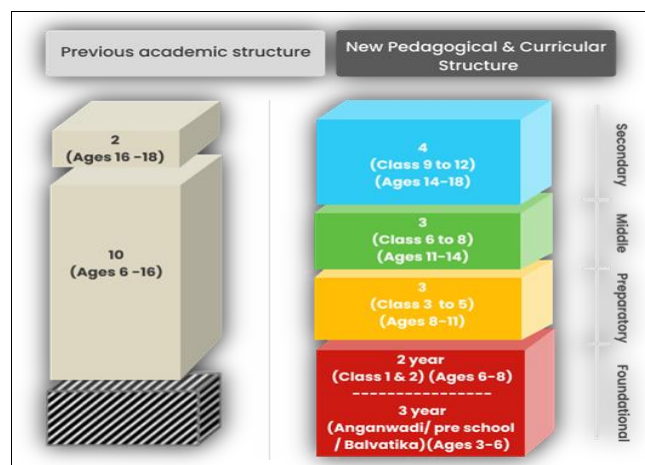
Source: NEP 2020 [38]

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a cornerstone of NEP 2020's 5+3+3+4 framework, which aims to enhance overall development, learning, and well-being. ECCE programmes begin at age year. On the other hand, NPE 1986 announced a 10+2+3 A framework for the fundamental stage should include 5 years of lower primary and 3 years of higher primary. Also made will be efforts to complete the two years of high school. With the implementation of the new NEP 2020, the Indian educational system is poised to catch up to international norms. Be compelled to accept the +2-stage as a component of education in schools across the country. Over 96% of the 1103 Indian students who participated in the online survey on the topic were optimistic about the outcomes of the new policy's implementation. Every five years, HIEs are required to undergo mandatory accreditation, which controls the level of instruction they deliver (Malik, 2021) [39]. NPE 1986 was a one-year programme that resulted in an M.Phil. Basic experience is provided for research in any field. Additionally, NEP 2020 is a 12-month degree programme that leads to an M.Phil. It has been discontinued in all subjects because undergraduate and graduate students must complete prerequisite coursework in every subject.

The discrepancy results from their various viewpoints on the goals of education. In the previous policy, understanding the world and human life was given more importance. According to NPE 1986, the three main objectives of education are the development of the human resource as a whole, international cooperation and peaceful coexistence, as well as the advancement of socialism, secularism, and democracy. The current policy gave more priority to encouraging citizens' intellectual development and personal growth. NEP 2020 states that the main objectives of

education are to help individuals realise their full potential, build a just and equitable society, and advance national development. The curriculum under the new policy is more likely to encourage critical thinking, discussion, and analytical learning with the aim of boosting India's talent and human resource base. Researchers studied research methodology and core-related studies during the Ph.D. programme in NPE 1986, but NEP 2020 suggests that researchers should also study teaching and curriculum development and core-related research during this time (Mandal, 2021) [40].

Conclusion
The findings of the present study suggest that higher education fulfils a variety of functions after a long battle. It is highly valued by many people, and developments are typically perceived as serious threats to specific social structures that favour rich groups. For making a quality education need to develop qualities of teachers (Ray, *et al.,* 2023) [41]. It is true that the main goal is to demonstrate that Nadia's total higher education has been satisfactorily completed in comparison to West Bengal. Today, we can categorically state that Nadia's higher education is progressive. A major e-governance initiative has been taken to bring in greater transparency and fairness in admissions to all UG and PG levels (Jana, 2017) [42]. From 2015 to 2020 the progressive of UG PG level of Nadia district is good but it is decreasing from post Corona period. General degree colleges are now under-enrolled, with very little effort among students getting a comparative education to succeed. The number of students is starting to decrease in general degree colleges. The entire country is being transformed into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy thanks to the Digital India Campaign. While education will be crucial to this shift, technology itself will be crucial to improving educational outcomes procedures and results; as a result, technology and education at all levels has a reciprocal relationship.

Acknowledgement

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