



Global Citizenship Education in India: Changing Landscape in Higher Education Post NEP 2020

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Abstract

Higher Education System is the cornerstone of individual's empowerment, social development and economic growth of a nation. After getting Independence, Indian higher education system focused on to universalizing access, professional and vocational development, and provide quality education. But, National Education Policy 2020 has changed the vision and landscape of Indian higher education system. India is now moving towards building a self-reliant and multidisciplinary vibrant higher education system guided by its own ethos and 21st century demands. Indian ethos like बसुधैवः कुटुम्बकम् (the earth is one family), यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् (the whole world is living in one family), etc., and 21st century demands like digital skills, critical thinking, innovation, communication skill, etc. promote the global citizenship education, which is not only essential, but also urgent to face the emerging global challenges including Climate change, Environmental degradation, Inequality in a pluralistic society, etc. Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is a multidimensional educational approach that combines cognitive understanding, socio-emotional development, and behavioral engagement to face the global challenges with empathy and responsibility. The aim of this paper is to explores and compares the changing trends of Indian higher education in pre and post NEP 2020 due to GCED. The methodology followed in this paper was narrative literature review. Data was collected from various database including Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis etc. using terms like "Global Citizenship Education", "Indian Higher Education", "NEP 2020" etc. to captured broader data source with Boolean operators which serves the aim of this paper. This paper highlights that before NEP 2020 the aim of Indian higher education system was to reach



out to every person, and to make them human resources for their community as well as the country, but post NEP 2020 through GCED Indian higher education system tries to prepare such resource person, who will be able to address unpredictable challenges not only for his community and nation but also for the whole world.

Keywords: Global Citizenship Education, Indian Higher Education, NEP 2020, SDG4, Indian Knowledge System

Introduction

Societal advancement, nation's development, and educational system are always interconnected and inter-dependent on each other (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Ankita et al., 2025; Kumar, 2023). Hence, education system should be changed from time to time as per societal demands for developing the nation, especially higher education system. Since higher education system is the cornerstone of individual's empowerment, social development, and economic growth of a nation. After getting independence in 1947 to till now Indian higher education system has gone through various changes due to socio-political and cultural transmissions (Ankita et al., 2025), globalization, liberalization, neo-liberalization, (Gaikwad, 2025; Kumar, 2023; Monga et al., 2016) etc. Since independence to till now the development of Indian higher education system in present form can be divided into three phases i.e. first phase is from 1947 to 1985 (Sen, 2016), second phase is from 1986 to 2019, and third phase is from 2020 to till now (Gaikwad, 2025). The National Policy on Education 1986 (NPE 1986) was a remarkable step for India's higher education (Borthakur et al., 2024; Sen, 2016) in the second phase. That is why the time period 1947 to 2019 is divided into two parts based on NPE 1986. Then after 34 years National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has come (Adhav, 2023; Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2024) with a revolutionary change (Gaikwad, 2025) in higher education system. The primary focus in first phase (1947 - 1985) was to build an own strong higher education system which was dismissed by British colonial, establish sound technical and medical education through IITs, AIIMs, spread the number of general colleges and universities to reach out to every people (Ankita et al., 2025; Sen, 2016). But there was no focus on to improve the quality of education or equal access to education, which was focused in second phase i.e. 1986 to 2019. In this time period, Indian higher education witnessed a remarkable change due to NPE 1986. The major reforms were to improve the quality of education, equal



access to higher education from marginalized or socially disadvantaged people or special needed students through promoting the inclusive education, introduced ODL and Online learning (Bordoloi, 2018), improve the vocational education. Though, in this phase higher education got less attention intentionally or unintentionally as compared to primary or secondary education. But in later time it came to its own track. The third or last phase i.e. 2020 to till now become first time a revolutionary phase of Indian higher education system, because of NEP 2020. The National Education Policy 2020 has changed the vision and landscape of Indian higher education system. India is now moving towards building a self-reliant, more holistic and multi-disciplinary, (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Gaur, 2023) vibrant (Aithal & Aithal, 2020) higher education system guided by its own ethos and 21st century demands (Gaur, 2023) aligned with SDG4 (Leite, 2022). Indian ethos like बसुधैवः कुटुम्बकम् (the earth is one family), यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् (the whole world is living in one family), (Rahaman & Chattopadhyay, 2025) etc. which are parts of Indian knowledge System (IKS), and 21st century demands e.g. digital skills, critical thinking, innovation, communication skills, etc. (Nag & Nial, 2024) combinedly promote the concept of Global Citizenship Education (Gaur, 2023), which is not only essential, but also urgent to face the emerging complex global challenges including Climate change, Environmental degradation, Inequality and injustice in a pluralistic society, Terrorism, violence and conflicts among countries, (Mohanty et al., 2024) etc. Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is a multidimensional educational approach that combines cognitive understanding, socio-emotional development, and behavioral engagement to face the global challenges with empathy and responsibility (UNESCO, 2015). GCED is a holistic and transformative educational approach which can empower learners with understanding of how local, national and global issues are interconnected and inter-dependent on each other (Gaur, 2023), and help them to take decision as an informed consent, engaged, responsible, and responsive global citizen. Therefore, post NEP 2020 through GCED, Indian higher education system has gained a long-term new vision from different corners of the world.

Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

India's higher education system has a rich history dating back to ancient times, with institutions like Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramshila, etc. attracting global students (Adhav, 2023; Alam,



2022; Ankita et al., 2025; Borthakur et al., 2024; Gaur, 2023; Sen, 2016). The British colonial era introduced an English-centric system, with Macaulay's Minute (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854) shaping education. Universities in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were established in 1857. The system grew steadily with the Inter-University Board formed in 1925 and the Sargent Report (1944) recommending the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1945. Initially overseeing three central universities, the UGC was later empowered to oversee all universities in 1947, marking a significant step in formalizing India's higher education system (Ankita et al., 2025; Borthakur et al., 2024). India's higher education system underwent significant transformations in post-independence, with a focus on qualitative and quantitative expansion. The University Commission, led by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in 1948, recommended restructuring the education system to meet national goals, including promoting research, professional education, and continuous assessment. The commission's suggestions led to the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1953. Subsequent committees, such as the Kothari Commission (1964) and the National Policy on Education (1968), emphasized internal transformation, qualitative improvement, and equalization of opportunities. The 1986 National Policy on Education aimed to instill critical values and promote education for development and equality. Later, the Acharya Ramamurthi Committee (1990), the National Knowledge Commission (2005), and Yashpal Committee (2009) had proposed strategies for revitalizing higher education, including establishing autonomous colleges, promoting research, and increasing access to knowledge. These efforts have shaped India's higher education system, with ongoing efforts to enhance quality, accessibility, and global competitiveness. The system continues to evolve, addressing the needs of a rapidly changing economy and society (Borthakur et al., 2024). In present times India has third largest higher education system in the world next USA and China (Devlal & Sharma, 2019; Nag & Nial, 2024).

Higher Education System and National Education Policy 2020

India's education policies have undergone significant transformations, with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 being the latest milestone. Replacing the 1986 policy, NEP 2020 aims to reform and revitalize the education system, focusing on equitable and inclusive education for all. It promotes technology integration, innovation, and research to prepare



students for the 21st century. Headed by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, the policy was approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020. NEP 2020 envisions making India a global knowledge superpower by providing quality education, regardless of socio-economic background or location. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines a plan to transform higher education in India. It proposes establishing renowned universities with high standards and a National Research Foundation (NRF) to fund research. The policy aims to increase the gross enrolment rate in higher education to 50% by 2035. It introduces a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, incorporating research at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The new structure includes four-year bachelor's degrees with multiple entry and exits options, research-focused master's degrees, and PhD opportunities. The policy also shifts the focus from teacher-centric to student-centric teaching, emphasizing critical thinking, discussion, and multi-disciplinary learning (Adhav, 2023; GOI, 2020). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes a significant overhaul of India's higher education regulatory framework by establishing the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). HECI would consolidate regulatory authorities into four verticals: the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) for regulation, the National Accreditation Council (NAC) for accreditation, the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for funding, and the General Education Council (GEC) for setting standards. This restructuring aims to enhance transparency, efficiency, and quality in higher education institutions (Bhattacharya, 2024; GOI, 2020).

Global Citizenship Education in India's Higher Education and NEP 2020

In today's interconnected world, issues like inequality, human rights abuses, and poverty threaten peace and environmental sustainability; to address these challenges, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is seen as a way to equip youth for a more inclusive and sustainable future. Promoting global social justice is key to achieving sustainable development. The idea of cosmopolitanism and global thinking has existed throughout human history. However, current discussions around Global Citizenship Education (GCED) are largely tied to UNESCO's initiatives. Despite being a relatively new concept for UNESCO, GCED's principles align with its founding goals of promoting peace, human rights, and equality (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). Global Citizenship Education (GCED) embodies a sense of belonging to a shared human community, acknowledging the interconnectedness of local, national, and global



spheres. This perspective encourages individuals to engage with global issues and take responsibility. As UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon noted, "We must foster Global Citizenship. Education gives us a profound understanding that we are tied together as citizens of the global community, and that our challenges are interconnected."(UNESCO, 2015, p.14). GCED has gained prominence, impacting policy, curricula, and learning. It comprises three core dimensions: cognitive (knowledge and critical thinking), socio-emotional (empathy and solidarity), and behavioural (responsible action). By fostering informed, empathetic, and active citizens, GCED empowers learners to contribute to a more just, peaceful, and inclusive world. This multifaceted approach draws on human rights, peace, and education for sustainable development, spanning all educational levels and encouraging participation through diverse pathways (UNESCO, 2015). Through GCED, the NEP 2020 aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals by developing their intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, and moral capacities. This holistic approach is expected to drive national transformation and position of India as a global knowledge leader (Gaur, 2023; GOI, 2020).

Objectives

The objectives of this present study are -

- 1) To understand the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) through Indian Knowledge System.
- 2) To understand and compare the changing landscape of Higher Education (HE) in pre- and Post NEP 2020 due to GCED.

Methodology

Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is already existing in Indian Knowledge System, which must be understood through explorative discourse. Therefore, to explore and understand the concept of GCED through IKS, and how GCED has transformed the landscape of Indian higher education system from pre- to post NEP 2020; the present study used Qualitative method,(Creswell, 2014) and Narrative literature review (Snyder, 2019) as a research methodology.

Review Protocol and Selection Criteria

Data was collected from various databases including Google Scholar, Springer Nature, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, and others to reach out to every nook and corner of the research



objectives. Several keywords were used like “Global Citizenship Education”, “Indian Higher Education”, “NEP 2020” and other relevant terms which were similar to these (Gusenbauer & Gauster, 2025). To capture the broader data source Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed which served the aim of this paper.

Inclusion Criteria

The studies were selected which have given the concept of GCED, and changing the landscape of Indian higher education in pre- and post NEP 2020 due to GCED. The requirements for inclusion were Seminar and conference proceeding papers, review studies, peer-reviewed publications in journals, and others published from 2012 to 2025, as UN general secretary Ban-ki Moon in 2012 first time declared the need of Global Citizenship Education at global level (UNESCO, 2015).

Exclusion Criteria

The studies were excluded which have covered the concepts other than GCED, higher education, and publications in languages other than English.

Data Extraction and Analysis

After reviewing the title, abstract, and full paper, 20 documents had been selected among 113 initial identified documents that fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Findings and Discussion

Objective - 1 (Global Citizenship Education in IKS)

बसुधैवः कुटुम्बकम् (Maha Upanishad, Chapter 6, Verse 72) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘the earth is one family’. This concept signifies that all human beings are equal regardless of their differences of caste, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, etc. are mutually related to, and part of a wider community.

यत्र विश्वं भवत्येकनीडम् (Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Chapter 4) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘the whole world is living in one family’. This concept promotes a global outlook rooted in solidarity, harmony, and interconnectedness, aiming to recognize the world as a unified whole.

अतिथिः देवो भवः (Taittiriya Upanishad, Shiksha balli, Mantra 11) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘guest is god’. This is a welcoming principle that urges people to extend hospitality to strangers and guests from diverse backgrounds. This attitude aligns with the spirit of global



citizenship and broader community inclusion. By treating visitors as sacred, the idea suggests, we foster more positive, meaningful, and joyful relationships.

कृण्वन्तो विश्वम् आर्यम् (Rigveda, Mandal 9, Sukta 63, Richa 5) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘to make the world noble’. This ancient phrase sets a high standard for ethics and morality, envisioning a world where virtue and righteousness thrive. By embracing this ideal, individuals are motivated to act with nobility and integrity, striving to make the world a better place. The ultimate goal is to promote the greater good, guided by principles of honor, virtue, and righteousness that benefit all.

तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति (Katha Upanishad, Khanda 2, Adhyaya 2, Mantra 15) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘by his radiance, all this shines’. This concept advocates that the universe is illuminated by a single, powerful force, and all beings are considered children of the same divine parent. This perspective views the entire world as one interconnected family, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity, unity, and shared responsibility among all individuals.

लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु - The meaning of this phrase is ‘may all beings everywhere be happy and free’. This is a means to give back, get involved, and ultimately build stronger, more connected communities. This concept promotes global welfare through public expressions of goodwill.

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् (Garuda Puran, Uttarakhand, Chapter 35, Verse 51) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘may all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer’. Through the lens of global citizenship education, this verse advocates for the well-being of people worldwide. The quest for a fulfilling life and happiness is a shared goal for people everywhere, not just a select few. This verse encourages a global perspective, promoting understanding and appreciation across cultures. At its core, global citizenship is about cultivating empathy and compassion for all individuals, regardless of their background, location, or socio-economic status. By embracing this mindset, we can work towards creating a more just and harmonious world.

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः (Rigveda, Mandal 01, Sukta 89, Richa 01) – The meaning of this phrase is ‘may the virtuous ideas come to us from all directions.’ This concept encourages us to welcome and integrate the best ideas and traditions from others, fostering a more harmonious



world built on peaceful coexistence. Embracing global citizenship means cultivating an open-minded and inclusive worldview, appreciating diverse perspectives and cultural practices.

Objective - 2 (Changing landscape of HE from Pre- to Post NEP 2020)

Aim of higher education system

In Pre- NEP 2020, the main aim was India's higher education system to develop a strong higher education system. Because at that time India was suffering by the effect of colonialism. But post NEP 2020, due to focusing on GCED the aim is to build a multi-disciplinary vibrant higher education system.

Objectives of education

In Pre- NEP 2020, objective was to provide quality and equal accessible higher education to maximum people irrespective of their disadvantage. While Post NEP 2020 objective is to provide research driven quality higher education to all the people to make them aware about the interconnection of any problem between local, national and global level.

Learning objectives

Before NEP 2020 the focus was to educate all the people and make them capable for job market, but after coming with NEP 2020 the vision is changed, and now try to create a knowledge-based society and global citizen.

Curriculum organization

In Pre- NEP 2020, India's higher education was strictly separated in discipline wise or stream wise. However, post NEP 2020 due to intervention of GCED, India's higher education is becoming inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary.

Pedagogical approach

Rote memorization to competency based pedagogical approach had been followed in during Pre- NEP 2020, but after post NEP 2020 India's higher education has changed the pedagogical approach and following experiential and outcome based pedagogical approach to make them active and responsive global citizen.

Assessment

During Pre- NEP 2020, the approach to assessment was text book oriented to achievement level based, while in Post NEP 2020 approach to assessment is changed, and now follows assessment



“as”, “of”, and “for” learning. Because assessment has not only judged someone’s capabilities rather make him as a capable for solving the problem from local level to global level.

Teacher

The role of a teacher was primary or sometimes as a secondary at the time of Pre- NEP 2020, and Post NEP 2020 the role of a teacher is secondary or as a mentor to build the students as global citizens.

Higher education institution

During Pre- NEP 2020, higher education institutions was either Affiliated Universities or Stand-alone Colleges or Universities. But Post NEP 2020, there are three types of higher education institutions i.e. Research universities, Teaching universities, and Autonomous colleges or Stand-alone colleges, which make the students capable for global society.

Table 1: Here is the tabulated form of all the findings that have come out from the literature review

Context	Pre- NEP 2020		Post NEP 2020
	Phase I (1947 - 1985)	Phase II (1986 - 2019)	Phase III (2020 - Present)
Aim of higher education system	To setup own higher education system to cater the diverse needs of Indian population.	To build a strong higher education system to compete with other countries.	To build a self-reliant, transformative, and multi-disciplinary higher education system.
Objectives of education	To provide education to maximum people.	To provide quality and equal accessible education.	To provide research-driven, quality, and equal accessible education.
Learning objectives	Educating to all the people	Able to be competed in global level job market	Create a knowledge-based society and global citizen



Curriculum organization	Single disciplinary	Inter-disciplinary.	Inter-disciplinary/Transdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary
Pedagogical approach	Rote memorization and Exam oriented	Critical thinking, creativity and Competency based	Critical thinking, Creativity, Innovative thinking, Higher Order thinking, Experiential and Outcome-based
Approaches to assessment of learning outcomes	Text book oriented	Achievement/Competency based	Assessment “as”, “of”, and “for” learning
Role of Teacher	Primary	Secondary	Secondary or as a Mentor
Higher education institutions	Single degree provider institutions – 1) Affiliated Universities 2) Standalone colleges/Universities	Single degree provider institutions – 1) Affiliated Universities 2) Standalone colleges/Universities	Three types of multi-disciplinary higher education institutions - 1) Research universities 2) Teaching universities 3) Autonomous colleges

India has adopted GCED approach in higher education along with other levels of education through implementation of NEP 2020 to build a cosmopolitan society like Austria, Germany, Japan, etc.

Conclusion

The pre- NEP 2020 phase of higher education development focused on to betterment of higher education system that can make learners as human resources and compete with other countries. But, post NEP 2020 due intervention of GCED the prime focus of higher education system is not only be competed, but also make cosmopolite citizens. The citizen who will be able to address the unpredictable challenges not only for his community and nation but also for the whole world. India has also developed an educational framework based on the concept of



GCED for higher education level. But one thing has to keep in mind that GCED fosters just and compassionate world society, empowering individuals to actively participate in it. This requires not only knowledge, but also personal motivation and commitment to drive positive changes.

Limitations

This paper didn't include the whole Indian ethos from IKS which have signified the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCED). Also, there are few works have done related to GCED on India's higher education. This paper didn't include any empirical study which has discussed the impact of GCED on India's higher education.

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