EPRA International Journal of Environmental Economics, Commerce and Educational Management
Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0414 |ISI I.F Value: 0.815|SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.57 ISSN: 2348 – 814X
Volume: 12 | Issue:2 | February 2025

PLANTING SEED OF CHANGE IN INDIAN EDUCATION: MULTIPLE ENTRY AND EXIT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra20372
DOI No: 10.36713/epra20372

ABSTRACT
In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of higher education, multiple entry and exit points (MEEPs) are emerging as a critical innovation to increase flexibility and inclusivity. This paper explores the conceptualization, implementation, and implications of the MEEP system in higher education, particularly in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduced in India. The system allows learners to pause their education, return at a later stage, and earn qualifications at different levels, ensuring that education adapts to individual needs and life circumstances. Through a multidisciplinary analysis, this paper aims to present the benefits of MEEP in increasing accessibility, fostering lifelong learning, and enhancing student autonomy while also addressing potential challenges related to administrative infrastructure, recognition of skills, and workforce readiness. The findings suggest that MEEPs, with proper implementation and supportive frameworks, have the potential to transform the educational landscape into a learner-centred system that is adaptable to societal and economic demands.
KEY WORDS:- *MEEPs , Education , Flexibility , Inclusivity , Lifelong Learning , Learner-Centred System , Adaptability*

INTRODUCTION
The evolution of higher education has traditionally followed a rigid and linear trajectory, where learners enter a program, study for a fixed number of years, and graduate with a degree. (Kuckertz & Stöckmann, 2017). This model has worked well for many years but has increasingly been criticized for its inflexibility and its inability to cater to the diverse needs of modern learners. (Bhandari & Yadav, 2021). The societal, economic, and technological transformations of the 21st century have shifted expectations in education and workforce training, compelling educators and policymakers to reconsider traditional academic pathways. As global economies move towards a more knowledge-intensive model, the need for flexible, inclusive, and lifelong learning opportunities has grown significantly. (World Economic Forum, 2020) In response to these changes, the idea of Multiple Entry and Exit Points (MEEPs) in higher education has emerged as a solution to bridge the gap between traditional education structures and the contemporary needs of learners and industries. In the Indian context, where access to education is often challenged by socio-economic barriers, family obligations, or personal circumstances, MEEPs serve as a game-changer

Table 13: Gross Enrolment Rate (GER): 2015-16

Level	ALL			SC			ST		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Primary (I-V)	97.9	100.7	99.2	109.5	112.4	110.9	107.8	105.7	106.7
Upper Primary (VI-VIII)	88.7	97.6	92.8	97.8	107.7	102.4	95.4	98.2	96.7
Elementary (I-VIII)	94.5	99.6	96.9	105.3	110.8	107.9	103.4	103.1	103.3
Secondary (IX-X)	79.2	81.0	80.0	83.9	86.9	85.3	73.7	75.4	74.5
Senior Secondary (XI-XII)	56.0	56.4	56.2	55.8	58.0	56.8	43.8	42.4	43.1
Higher Education	25.4	23.5	24.5	20.8	19.0	19.9	15.6	12.9	14.2

Data Source:
For School Education: National Institute of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi
Figures related to School Education are provisional.
For Higher Education: Department of Higher Education, MHRD, Government of India

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Context and Relevance of MEEPs

In today's world, education is no longer confined to the traditional demographic of young adults pursuing higher education immediately after completing secondary school (World Economic Forum, 2020). Modern students come from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and life situations. Many students face interruptions in their education due to personal circumstances such as financial difficulties, family responsibilities, or the need to gain work experience. Others may wish to enhance their skills throughout their careers, necessitating periodic returns to educational institutions to reskill or upskill in response to technological advancements or shifts in job markets. (Thomas & Quinn, 2007).Additionally, the rapid evolution of knowledge in fields like technology, healthcare, and business has made continuous learning an essential part of maintaining a competitive edge in the workforce.

The conventional "one-size-fits-all" approach to education, where students progress through predefined stages of learning without deviation, does not serve the needs of this increasingly diverse student population. The traditional model often forces learners into a linear progression that may not account for disruptions or the need for alternate pathways. This rigidity contributes to high dropout rates and lower level of enrollment rate and limits opportunities for many who wish to return to education after a break.

ENROLLMENT OF STUDENT AT DIFFERENT LEVEL IN DIFFERENT YEAR

Table-27: Level-wise Enrolment

A: All Categories of Students (In lakh)

Level/ Year	Primary (I-V)			Upper Primary (VI-VIII)			Secondary (IX-X)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1950-51	138	54	192	26	5	31	NA	NA	NA
1960-61	236	114	350	51	16	67	NA	NA	NA
1970-71	357	213	570	94	39	133	NA	NA	NA
1980-81	453	285	738	139	68	207	NA	NA	NA
2000-01	640	498	1138	253	175	428	116	74	190
2005-06	705	616	1321	289	233	522	145	105	250
2006-07	711	626	1337	299	246	545	149	110	259
2007-08	711	644	1355	311	262	573	159	123	282
2008-09	706	647	1353	314	270	584	165	130	295
2009-10	697	639	1336	317	278	595	169	138	307
2010-11	701	646	1347	327	292	619	175	143	318
2011-12	726	672	1398	331	299	630	186	155	341
2012-13*	696	652	1348	333	317	650	183	163	346
2013-14*	686	638	1324	341	323	664	197	176	373
2014-15*	676	629	1305	345	327	672	201	182	383
2015-16*	669	622	1291	347	329	676	205	186	391

NA: Not Available
Note: from 1950-51 to 1980-81, figures for Class XI-XII include Class IX-X
Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India / National Institute of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi
* Figures are provisional.
Contd.

Table-27: Level-wise Enrolment

A: All Categories of Students (In lakh)

Level/ Year	Senior Secondary (XI-XII)			Higher Education		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1950-51	13	2	15	4	0	4
1960-61	27	7	34	8	2	10
1970-71	57	19	76	26	7	33
1980-81	76	34	110	35	13	48
2000-01	61	38	99	54	32	86
2005-06	78	56	134	88	55	143
2006-07	81	60	141	96	60	156
2007-08	93	70	163	106	66	172
2008-09	95	74	169	112	73	185
2009-10	99	79	178	124	83	207
2010-11	109	86	195	155	120	275
2011-12	116	94	210	162	130	292
2012-13*	107	93	200	166	135	301
2013-14*	118	105	223	175	148	323
2014-15*	124	111	235	185	157	342
2015-16*	130	117	247	186	160	346

NA: Not Available
Note: from 1950-51 to 1980-81, figures for Class XI-XII include Class IX-X
Data Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India / National Institute of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi
* Figures are provisional.
Contd.

From the above data released by the MHRD (now MoE) it is clear that the number of enrolments that happen in primary level that much enrolment is not taking place in higher education this may due to the rigidity of the curriculum of higher education.

The concept of MEEPs presents a solution to this problem by enabling students to enter and exit academic programs at various points, accumulating credits over time. Instead of committing to a single, uninterrupted

academic journey, learners can pursue education in stages, with the ability to pause and resume their studies as their circumstances allow. This model acknowledges that education is not a one-time event but rather a lifelong process that should accommodate the varied rhythms of an individual's life. (UNESCO, 2019)

The Emergence of MEEPs

The idea of providing multiple entry and exit points in higher education is not entirely new. Many countries have been experimenting with different forms of educational flexibility, driven by changes in their social and economic landscapes. For instance, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), through the Bologna Process, has established credit transfer systems that allow students to move between institutions and even across countries while retaining their earned credits. The goal is to create a more mobile, adaptable student body capable of engaging in continuous learning throughout their careers.

In the United States, competency-based education (CBE) models are increasingly popular, allowing learners to progress through academic programs at their own pace based on demonstrated mastery of skills and knowledge, rather than the traditional time-bound structure. This allows students to "enter" or "exit" their learning programs at various points depending on their achievements and competencies.

These global experiences highlight that flexible education systems can be a catalyst for democratic higher education, making it more accessible to individuals who might otherwise be excluded due to the rigid structures of traditional systems.

National Education Policy 2020: A Milestone in MEEP Implementation

In India, the introduction of Multiple Entry and Exit Points (Chapter 4, section 4.3 ,NEP 2020) is one of the most transformative aspects of the National Education Policy 2020, which aims to improve the Indian education system to make it more inclusive, flexible, and student-centred. NEP 2020 recognizes the limitations of the existing education system, which often forces students to either complete a full degree or exit with no formal recognition of their learning if they drop out early.

NEP 2020, provides structured exit options for students at different stages of their undergraduate education, allowing them to earn:

- **A certificate after completing one year of study,**
- **A diploma after two years,**
- **A bachelor's degree after three years,**
- **An honours or research-based bachelor's degree after four years**.

This flexible framework provides learners with multiple opportunities to gain formal recognition for their studies at various stages, giving them the option to return and continue their education at any point in their lives. Additionally, the policy introduces the concept of an Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), a digital repository where students' earned credits are stored and can be transferred between institutions. This initiative aims to ensure that no learning is lost if a student exits early or wishes to continue their education at a different institution or after a gap period.

By providing such flexibility, the NEP 2020 seeks to address critical issues such as high dropout rates and the lack of access to education for students from marginalized communities. It also aligns with the global shift towards lifelong learning, where individuals continuously acquire and update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

Lifelong Learning and the Modern Workforce

The need for multiple entry and exit points in higher education also stems from the growing emphasis on lifelong learning in the modern economy. In the past, individuals often pursued a single career path for life, and the skills and knowledge they acquired during their initial education were sufficient to sustain them throughout their working years. However, technological advancements, globalization, and the rapid pace of change in industries such as information technology, healthcare, and finance have created a workforce where skills become obsolete quickly. As a result, employees must continually update their knowledge and learn new competencies to remain relevant.

According to reports from the World Economic Forum and other global institutions, many of the jobs that today's students will hold in the future do not yet exist, and many current roles are likely to be replaced or transformed by automation, artificial intelligence, and other technologies. (World Economic Forum, 2020) This shifting job landscape has resulted in the rise of what is often termed the "gig economy" or "knowledge economy," where

workers frequently move between jobs and need to adapt to new roles and responsibilities. Lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling have thus become critical for individuals to navigate these changes effectively.

MEEPs in higher education respond directly to this need by allowing individuals to pursue education at different stages of their careers. For instance, a working professional may choose to exit higher education after obtaining a diploma to gain work experience and later return to complete a degree when they need to advance their career. This flexibility ensures that education remains relevant and accessible to individuals throughout their lives, allowing them to upskill or reskill as their personal or professional circumstances evolve.

Integration of MEEPs within ITEP: Ensuring Flexibility in Teacher Education
While ITEP is structured as a four-year continuous program, it can benefit from the flexibility offered by MEEPs, enabling teacher candidates to progress through their education in a more flexible manner. The introduction of Multiple Entry and Exit Points within ITEP aligns well with the vision of NEP 2020 to provide flexible, modular education options that allow learners to pause and resume their education as needed, without losing credits.

Key areas where MEEPs and ITEP intersect are as follows:
Under the MEEP system, future teachers enrolled in ITEP would have multiple exit options, a student who exits after:

- **One Year:** Could receive a Certificate in Educational Foundations, recognizing foundational knowledge in teaching practices and educational theory**.**
- **Two Years**: Could receive a Diploma in Teacher Education, allowing them to work in certain non-teaching roles within the education sector or to continue their education at a later stage.
- **Three Years**: Could be awarded a Bachelor's Degree in the core subject suitable for entry into administrative or other educational support roles.
- **Four Years:** Completion of the entire four-year program would earn them an Integrated Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Degree, making them fully qualified teachers.

This modular structure allows students to exit the program early if necessary, without completely abandoning their career path, and provides multiple re-entry points for them to resume their education

Multiple Entry and Exit Points: Toward a Learner-Centred Future
MEEPs represent a shift from the traditional teacher-centred model of education, where the curriculum, pace, and structure of learning were directed by institutions. Instead, MEEPs embrace a learner-centred approach, where the individual has greater autonomy and control over their educational journey. This shift acknowledges that learners have different goals, life experiences, and learning preferences, and education should be flexible enough to accommodate these differences.

At the heart of the MEEP system is the recognition that education is not just about obtaining a degree but about acquiring the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world. By allowing students to design their own educational pathways and offering multiple exit and re-entry points, MEEPs promote a more personalized and adaptive learning experience that is responsive to the diverse needs of students and the evolving demands of the job market.

Significance of introduction of Multiple Entry and Exit in higher education in Indian context.
Increased Access to Education
MEEPs have the potential to make higher education more accessible to individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and marginalised group . The ability to take a break and return to studies ensures that personal and financial constraints do not permanently derail an individual’s educational aspirations.

Support for Lifelong Learning
In today's knowledge-driven economy, learning is no longer confined to one's early years of life. Professionals need to upskill and reskill regularly to keep pace with the demands of the job market. MEEPs support this model by allowing individuals to return to the educational system at any stage of their careers.

Personalized Learning Pathways
MEEPs promote the idea of personalized education pathways. Students can design their academic journey according to their needs, career goals, and interests, without being constrained by rigid structures. This flexibility also allows students to pursue multiple disciplines or switch fields as they discover their passions.

Reduced Dropout Rates
Many students discontinue their education due to unforeseen circumstances such as financial difficulties, health issues, or family responsibilities. With MEEPs, students can pause their studies without the fear of losing their progress. This flexibility can significantly reduce dropout rates by allowing learners to return when they are ready.

Challenges and Criticisms of MEEP
While MEEPs offer numerous advantages, there are also several challenges associated with their implementation.

Administrative Complexity
Implementing MEEP requires robust administrative infrastructure to track student progress, manage credit transfers, and ensure that students can seamlessly re-enter programs after a break. Institutions may struggle with the logistical demands of such a system, particularly in large-scale public universities.

Quality Assurance
Ensuring that students who exit early have acquired sufficient knowledge and skills can be challenging. Quality assurance mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that certificates and diplomas earned through early exits are valued in the job market.

Recognition of Interim Qualifications
One of the key concerns with MEEPs is whether employers and industry will recognize the value of interim qualifications (e.g., certificates, diplomas) awarded before degree completion. Without widespread recognition, the value of these qualifications could be diminished, undermining the flexibility that MEEPs aim to provide.

Financial Considerations
Frequent exits and re-entries can result in increased tuition costs for students. Additionally, institutions might face financial uncertainty due to fluctuating student numbers and the need to maintain operational flexibility.

Recommendations for Effective MEEP Implementation
Strengthen Administrative Support Systems
Institutions need to develop strong administrative frameworks to track student progress, manage credit transfers, and support re-entry processes. This includes investing in technology platforms like Academic Banks of Credit and developing robust data management systems.

Collaboration with Industry
To ensure that interim qualifications are valued by employers, educational institutions must work closely with industries to align curriculum design with market demands. This includes engaging employers in curriculum development and creating awareness about the benefits of MEEPs.

Financial Support for Students
Governments and institutions should offer financial support mechanisms, such as scholarships and flexible payment options, to ensure that students can afford to exit and re-enter programs without facing undue financial burdens.

Continuous Faculty Training
Faculty members must be trained to adapt to the flexible learning environment that MEEPs necessitate. This includes developing skills in modular curriculum design, assessment for diverse learner needs, and blended learning methodologies.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Multiple Entry and Exit Points in higher education represents a significant shift towards a more flexible, inclusive, and learner-centred approach to education. As societies move toward lifelong learning models, MEEPs offer a way to ensure that education systems are adaptable to the diverse needs of learners. The success of this approach, however, depends on robust administrative frameworks, collaboration between educational institutions and industries, and the development of supportive policies that make learning accessible to all.

MEEPs have the potential to democratize education, reduce dropout rates, and foster a culture of continuous learning. If effectively implemented, they can transform the higher education landscape, making it more responsive to the needs of learners and the demands of a rapidly changing global economy.

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