

# Current Scenario of Educational Policies & Strategies of Mekong Ganga Cooperation Countries with Reference to Higher Education

**Bikash Ghanta**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, W.B.

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## ABSTRACT

Education is the main guide of human progress. Education brings consciousness, increases the innovative power of people, widens the way forward for the future. In the general sense, education is to achieve the development of the larger society and the world by achieving the full development of the inherent abilities and skills of the people. All the countries of the world are gradually trying to establish themselves firmly through incredible changes and refinements in their education systems. New plans are created daily; goals are set for the future. Because every country agrees on one thing that education is the only means and weapon by which it can move forward. Just as primary education and secondary education on the one hand lay the foundations of society, higher education has a significant impact on the larger development of society as higher education is directly related to the country's economy, science, research and industry. This research paper sheds light on the educational plans and strategies on higher education of the countries included in Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. Mekong Ganga Cooperation is a multidimensional organization, consists of India and 5 ASEAN countries i.e., Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, that was launched in 2000 in the capital of the Lao PDR, Vientiane by focusing on four aspects of development namely Tourism, Culture, Education and Transport and Communication. The recent educational policies and strategic plans of these countries are analyzed to know the shape of higher education. Basically, it is a qualitative research work where qualitative data is used entirely and the sources of data are secondary sources. A comparative conclusion is

reached by analyzing the data obtained. As a result, it is found that each country has its own goals according to its socio-economic context which it strives to achieve. On the other hand, educational frameworks contain goals that are common to all countries.

**Key words:** Higher education, Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Educational Policies & Strategies

## INTRODUCTION

Education keeps the flow of society moving freely. The developments in economic, social and cultural aspects are kept steady through education. It is an unending attempt for humans to keep this flow of development stable and gift the future generation a beautiful world. The world is full of diversity and so have been the lifestyle and wants of people depending on different regions and time periods of human civilization. It can be observed that the surroundings and background of countries determine the lifestyle, wants and purpose of life for the citizens. As a result, there are differences and diversity in the education systems of the world. These differences cannot be removed however; it is possible to bring about a union between these varied approaches. There are international organizations such as the UNESCO that set some parameters for the countries to follow for their own benefit.

Every country develops their own educational policies to break free from their socio-economic immobility. Prospects for achieving a developmental flow can lay

hidden in proper and effective policies. A well-planned policy sets the direction for the country to move forward to. In other words, they present a picture of the place where they want to have the country to be at, after a particular amount of time.

The modern world today is going through a phase of a cold war and all countries are involved in it. It is obvious that every country wants to achieve the greatest heights of development and modernity, thereby making progressions in all positive directions. The more a country is developed in terms of educational policy the more that country is ahead of others. It is because; education is connected with modern and progressive thinking, quality of lifestyle of the people and the socio-economic structure. The developed countries have already made much progress in education system. The developing countries are constantly moving towards making themselves well progressed. However, the under developed countries are trying eagerly to bring about progression by constantly trying to revise and restructure their education system.

This research work here discusses the future plans of the 6 participating nations of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. The primary and secondary education all the mentioned countries provide the people a minimum literacy and numeracy and awaken the consciousness of the citizens. The higher education on the other hand helps the country achieve international spirit, strengthen the economic structure and clearing the path for research works.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation consists of India and five other ASEAN countries - Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The purpose of this organization is to establish a deep relationship between the countries sharing the river basins of the Mekong and the Ganges. It came into existence in 2000 when Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was established in the capital city of Vientiane of Lao PDR and the focus was given to nourish the culture and trade between these countries. There are four areas of

cooperation for the organisation which are - Education, Culture, Tourism and Transport and Communication.

The research work analyses the recent strategies or plans or policies of the 6 countries mentioned above. The strategies adopted and the directions in which these countries are moving themselves towards are revealed. For providing the picture of the future plans for higher education in those countries, the following plans are analysed - Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (Cambodia), National Education Policy 2020 (India), National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21 (Myanmar), Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025 (Lao PDR), National Education Plan 2017-2036 (Thailand) and Vietnam Education Development Strategy 2009-2020 (Vietnam).

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

The objectives of this paper are:

- To provide a general idea about the organization of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation;
- To throw light on the outlines of existing higher education systems prevailing in six participating nations of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation;
- To make a comparative study between Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam in terms of the recent educational plans and strategies on their higher education.

### **METHODOLOGY USED**

Qualitative research method is adopted for this research work. Information is analysed through document-based analysis primarily. This research work only takes into account the information only procured from secondary source and analysis of those data. Journals, articles, research papers and authentic books have been used to give this work a proper shape. However, for finding the main statistics, the recent educational reports of the 6 participating countries of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation have been analysed thoroughly. For presenting the

existing higher educational system of the mentioned countries, the following plans have been analysed— Cambodia's Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, India's National Education Policy 2020, Myanmar's National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021, Lao PDR's Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2023, Thailand's National Education Plan 2017-2036 and Vietnam's Vietnam Education Development Strategy 2009-2020. Finally, a comparison is made between Mekong-Ganga countries relating to higher education systems to get a clear picture about future directions of higher education of those countries.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Cambodia (Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023)**

The Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government of Cambodia has a goal to develop Cambodia to be an upper-middle income country by 2030 and to a high-income country by 2050. The strategy focuses on four themes— Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency. The strategic objective taken by the Government of Cambodia to ensure national socio-economic development is to bring about a “quality, equitable and inclusive educational system” focusing specially on science and technology, physical education and the labour market orientation. Cambodia's SDG 4 based on the Education Road Map 2030 gives importance to the following matters— ensuring equal access for males and females, providing life-long learning and improving the quality of the structure of governance and management. Another goal is to achieve a gross enrolment ratio of 16.9% by 2023 and 25% by 2030 for tertiary education in the country. The Education Strategic Plan of 2019-2023 also lays out two independent goals— “better access and the betterment of higher education programmes in terms of their quality so that the nation achieves national and international accreditation”; “improve the quality of management system and

governance in order for the Higher Education Institutions to get full autonomy”. The following strategies are adopted to fulfil the goals above—

Investments that are based on results are to be increased for prioritized higher education programmes

an emphasis is to be given towards higher education partnership programmes so that they can be developed and thereby the capacity for teaching, learning and research could be increased

number of PhDs and full-time academic staffs should be increased

making HEIs fully autonomous though empowering the management system for human resource and finance

the system of quality assurance is to be strengthened

### **India (National Education Policy 2020)**

India is progressing towards becoming a developed nation. Furthermore, it wants to be among the 3 largest economies of the world. The country would certainly prefer having the best serving education system of the world by the year 2040 which would have equitable access for its citizens into the best quality of education practicable. All learners irrespective of their economic and social background should be able to avail higher education of that kind. For India, National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The highlight of the policy remains to be not just trying to develop the cognitive capacities of the learners. It rather is the development of the foundational capacities (literacy and numeracy) of the learners and the cognitive capacities of higher order such as critical thinking and problem solving and additionally the development of emotional, ethical and social capacities in them. In the policy, there are mentions of certain ‘key changes’ in the National Education Policy of 2020 which would revise the sub-sector of higher education and give it a new refreshed form and they are— establishing a big and multidisciplinary higher education system; stressing on setting up a

multidisciplinary under-graduate education system; prioritizing the autonomy of the institution and the faculty; reframing the matters of assessment, curriculum and pedagogical elements; progress in career based on the quality of teaching, research and the service provided and conducting meritorious appointments to reassure the bond between the faculty and the institutional leadership; using National Research Foundation to carry out research works in the colleges and universities successfully; to achieve higher mobility in terms of the governance of the HEIs by establishing qualified independent boards; establishing a single regulatory body for increasing the aspects of access, equity and inclusion in higher education and the main policy of the body would be 'light but tight'. In India, by 2040 all the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) would be upgraded to multidisciplinary institutions. The aim is to achieve a gross enrolment ration of 50% by 2035 from a 26.3% ration in 2018.

#### **Lao PDR (Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025)**

The overall focus of this plan is to create opportunities for people of Lao PDR by conducting the Education and Sports Sector of the country properly. This helps in ensuring the access to quality education and spots for every citizen of the nation. The Plan also eyes at enhancing the country from having the status of least developed country by 2025 by causing socio-economic development and also achieving the objectives laid out in the Sustainable Development Goal 4. Objectives within this Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025 include development of higher education for fulfilling the economic and social goals of the National Socio-Economic Development Policy; to develop programmes related to technology especially, for the students of natural sciences; strengthening the Centres of Excellence for Public and Private Universities; carrying out tracer studies consistently for understanding the

employability of the graduates; improving the quality of lectures; increasing the budget allocated for university scholarship programmes and formulating and providing scholarships for students for higher studying abroad.

Laos has fixed the following targets— increasing the number of STEM Graduates from the public universities where the number would reach 20,000 by 2025; the current GPI gets up to 0.09 at least by 2025 for the number of public universities graduated (Bachelor's or higher); the number of students in natural sciences should increase from other students by 50%; a team for tracing the graduate employment for each faculty is to be established.

#### **Myanmar (National Education Strategic Plan 2010-21)**

The education system in Myanmar has long been in the dark. It is only in recent times that the National Educational System of the country entered into public debate and scrutiny. There is a new hope among the students, parents and the stakeholders and employees for making reforms in the education to improve the quality of education in the country for all levels of education. The National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21 of Myanmar provides a roadmap for the government, the educationists, the stakeholders and the citizens alike so that Myanmar can develop a new progressive national educational system. The strategies taken to propel Myanmar towards the future and to bring about reforms in the higher education were as follows— making the capacity for governance and management for higher education stronger. The necessary steps taken for that are— firstly, setting up partnership with international universities, research centres and other higher education institutions; establishment of a National Institute for Higher Education Development (NIHED) for improving the governance and management for higher education, for developing personal skills and for increasing institutional capabilities;

strengthening the governance for the institutions through setting up University Charters and University Councils; increasing the accountability and autonomy of the higher education institutions and establishing Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency in order to control the quality and standards of higher education.

Secondly, for the improvement of quality and appropriateness of the Higher Education Institutions, the programmes for these purposes include— Establishing a National Research and Innovation Fund for each Higher Education Institution and setting up Development Centres; formulating policies and strategies for building world class National Universities and Comprehensive Universities; upgrading facilities inside certain selected higher education institutions; working on improving the infrastructure of e-learning centres and e-libraries; expanding the distance education even more.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> strategic objective is — the equitable access into the system of higher education should be expanded and to achieve that a developed teaching-learning environment to be set up in each higher education institution; improving the student-support programmes; ensuring equitable access to all learners irrespective of their social or economic background.

### **Thailand (National Education Plan 2017-2036)**

Thailand recognises education to be the main tool for development for the country. The National Education Plan 2017-2036 has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Education Council of the Ministry of Education for the coming 20 years. This version of the plan is created to issue directions in terms of deciding the objectives of the education system and its direction. It looks to achieve an education system where there would be opportunity for education for all Thai people and there would not be any discrimination when it comes to availing quality education for them. The idea is to create a human resource

based on the demands of the job market and the development of the country. The vision of this National Education Plan is to provide all citizens quality education. It lays the foundation for many progressive plans— it looks to make such an education management system and process where the opportunities are accessible to all citizens; developing the quality of knowledge, character and learning skills of the citizens relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century so that they can develop their own potentials and they can learn by themselves forever; to create a stabilised environment for the nation; achieving a moral and high quality Thai society where everyone would live with peace, security and self-sufficiency; increasing the potential and competitiveness of Thailand and uplifting it from being a middle-income country into making it one of the top countries of the world.

### **Vietnam (Vietnam Education Development Strategy 2009-2020)**

Vietnam definitely realises the need of a well-developed educational strategic plan for the economic development of the country as well as achieving a new Vietnamese generation. An education plan needs to be form keeping in mind the time. The first educational plan for Vietnam in 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the Vietnamese Education Strategy 2001-2010 which ran for 8 years. The educational development practice suggests that the country is headed in the direction however, it needs proper coordination. The Education Development Strategy 2009-2020 has been working depending on the major objectives of the Education Development Strategy 2001-2010 and is working in accomplishing the coordination necessary which would cause fundamental changes in the next decade. The main aspects of higher education covered by this plan are— to raise the number of learners for each 10,000 citizens to 450 by 2020; spreading the non-public higher education in the country— “efforts are made to have about 40% of all students studying in non-public higher education institutions,

for higher education”; within 2020 there would be 15,000 students from abroad registering their names for education in Vietnam; after graduating the students would achieve modern knowledge, the skills for creative works as well as practical skills, have the capability of critical thinking and solving problems; by 2020 at least 5% of the graduates in the universities would be as qualified as the excellent graduates from the leading ASEAN universities.

## **RESULTS**

Without a clear path to follow, the road only leads to uncertainty. Every nation determines their motive and objectives of education based on their own demands, socio-economic structure and cultural and geographical positions. The countries strive to achieve their objectives keeping the hope of achieving its objectives. The thing that is clear is every nation wants to be developed and they want to see themselves in a higher position.

1. Cambodia has in its roadmap the future where it would assure equal access in higher education for men and women alike by improving the management and governance of higher education. It would also arrange life-long learning opportunities for the citizens. Furthermore, a 25% gross enrolment ratio by 2030 for tertiary education.
2. India looks to accomplish a multidisciplinary higher education system by 2040 as per its future goals for higher education. They will focus on the providing autonomy and accountability to the higher education institutions for strengthening the management and governance. India will develop in their learners social, emotional and ethical capacities and also problem-solving ability and critical thinking through higher education.
3. The future plan for Laos is to make quality higher education accessible to all citizens by managing the education and sports sector properly. By adopting these measures for higher education, the

country looks to upgrade them from the status of being the least developed country by 2025 through socio-economic development.

4. Myanmar strives to make their management and governance of higher education stronger and thereby better the quality of its HEIs and also work on their relevance. The country also eyes at expanding their accessibility. In future, for higher education, they look to ensure equitable access.
5. Thailand wants to provide all Thai people opportunity in higher education with no discrimination in accessing quality education. Achieving a vibrant human resource is another objective for Thailand in the future and this human resource would be created keeping the demands of the job market and the development of the country in mind which would also enable Thailand to be recognised as one of the leading countries of the world and not a middle economic country anymore.
6. For future, Vietnam has the task of expanding the non-public higher education. The future directions for Vietnam also lead towards improving the higher education institutions up to international standards thereby inviting the students from abroad. The graduates would be so qualified that at least 5% of all graduates can be as good as their counterparts from the leading ASEAN universities who are already considered to be excellent.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Higher education heavily influences all aspects of development for a given country. Although the primary education and secondary education develop the civil qualities in learners and helps them develop and value their national identity, higher education plays a big role to develop and awaken the international awareness within them. The member countries of Mekong-Ganga Cooperation have some differences as per their future directions with higher

education system within them based on their demands and their socio-economic conditions and these different future directions are adopted to benefit those countries. Again, these nations have formulated some plans to make themselves competitive in the world market and to display themselves in the world scene. Each nation in discussion is either a developing or an under developed country. Therefore, all of them have resolved to achieve the highest status as a country which is a developed country and they have taken steps in that direction. The analysis also discovers that these countries have focused on strengthening their system of governance and management because, they have realised that in order to run an education system easily and smoothly, a decent governance and management system is much required.

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