Lowering PhD eligibility criteria is not advisable

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There is no denying the fact that the NEP 2020 is a revolutionary
policy framework that seeks to refashion different domains of
education in India. For taking up a PhD degree programme in
any discipline, the criterion so far has been a Master's degree
with a minimum 55% marks. In some universities, MPhil has also been an additional
qualification to join PhD. However, while retaining the usual categories of eligibility, the
provision vide clause 11:10 (c) of the New Education Policy to allow candidates with a "4-
year Bachelor's degree (with research)" to join the PhD programme directly is hardly
appealing. The Times of India had rightly advised in its editorial a few days ago about the
rethink on the issue. As a university professor, I feel that the issue should not be allowed
to vanish from the radar of the academia and should be debated seriously, for there is still
time for reconsideration.

There are several grounds which support rescinding the new qualification. For one, as per
Clause15.9 of the NEP 2020, "PhD students will also have a minimum number of hours of
actual teaching experience gathered through teaching assistantships and other means."
This being the expectation, it is unthinkable how a candidate with a UG qualification will
be able to teach a PG class. Or will there be always the consideration to assign only a UG
class for teaching? Even there, it is doubtful if the PhD candidate with UG qualification
will muster respect in the classroom.

The dilution of the eligibility for the PhD entrance stands in sharp contrast to the
upgradation of the programme for teacher training at the school level. Clause 5.23
stipulates that by the year 2030, the minimum degree qualification for teaching will be a
4-year integrated BEd degree, instead of the one or two-year BEd programmes prevalent
now. The idea is that a teacher should be capable of teaching a wide range of knowledge
content with appropriate pedagogy for which s/he would be provided strong practicum
training in the form of student-teaching at local schools. While the teacher training
programme for the schools – BEd – is being given the desired importance, the value of
teaching qualification for a college/university – which is what PhD degree is generally
about – is being given a short shrift.

It maybe that the intent behind lowering the bar for the PhD entrance is to provide easy
access to an extraordinarily brilliant mind in the field of say, science and technology, but
such a person has been facilitated by different universities off and on through special

resolutions in academic councils. But to provide the facility in general would mean we see a PhD trainee teacher equipped with the mental calibre necessary for the job, which is generally not the case. Again, we must also think of the large number of private universities operating in the country, a majority of which have been found wanting in assigning PhD programme, the kind of seriousness it deserves. Lowering of the bar for eligibility will allow them to go for a no holds barred kill while making a mincemeat of the NEP provision.

I remember that during the viva voce of a friend who had completed the formalities of the DLitt degree in English literature, the interviewing professors asked if he was well versed in any classical language like Latin or Greek because in order to be respected as a DLitt degree holder, he would be expected to have a comprehensive view of European literature. In the competitive world in which we live, it is advisable to set high standards and not lower the bar particularly in the field of academic research which is bound be to a PhD degree.

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