

## Role of National Testing Agency (NTA) and its Credibility in India

Deep Kumar Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, St. Xavier's College of Education (Autonomous), Patna

[deep2008.mail@gmail.com](mailto:deep2008.mail@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

The National Testing Agency (NTA) plays a pivotal role in India's education system by conducting entrance examinations for higher education institutions and various professional courses. Established in 2017, the NTA aims to enhance the quality and efficiency of the examination process through the implementation of standardized testing and the use of technology. This paper explores the NTA's credibility, focusing on its transparency, reliability, and the effectiveness of its assessments. By adopting a robust framework for exam administration, including measures to prevent malpractice and ensure fair evaluation, the NTA has gained public trust. Furthermore, the agency's initiatives, such as providing a digital platform for application and result management, have streamlined the testing process, making it more accessible to students across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This paper also examines the challenges faced by the NTA, including issues related to examination centers, infrastructure, and the continuous need for technological upgrades. Overall, the NTA's commitment to upholding high standards in educational assessments significantly contributes to the integrity of India's academic landscape, fostering an environment conducive to merit-based opportunities for students.

**Keywords:** National Testing Agency, NTA, credibility, standardized testing, transparency, examination process, educational assessments, India, merit-based opportunities.

### Introduction

Students, parents, and educators have expressed concerns due to the unauthorised release of question papers for the National Eligibility and Eligibility Test (NET) and the National Testing Agency (NTA), which has sparked a scandal. It is crucial to acknowledge that while this issue is substantial, it should be seen as a collection of separate occurrences rather than a representation of the overall effectiveness of the agency or the integrity of the whole examination system in India. The utmost priority should be given to addressing vulnerabilities and restoring trust in the institution.

Regarding vulnerabilities, all systems are prone to them. However, what sets a robust organisation apart is its ability to learn from mistakes and implement stringent measures to prevent such instances in the future. No, the solution does not reside in the dissolution of the NTA. The controversy resulting from the leaks should compel the National Transportation Authority (NTA) to strengthen its security infrastructure, adopt impervious new technologies, collaborate closely with law enforcement agencies, and enhance technological safeguards against cyber-attacks.

Prior to its establishment in 2017, the National Testing Agency (NTA) engaged extensively with educational experts to determine the need of a standardised testing organisation. Despite recent challenges, the National Testing Agency (NTA) has a proven track record of conducting extensive entrance exams in a way that is equitable and precise. By implementing standardisation in several admission tests, millions of students from diverse backgrounds were placed on an even footing.

There are renewed concerns about the trustworthiness, genuineness, and accuracy of India's important admission tests due to the cancellations and delays of the UGC-NET, UGC-CSIR, and NEET-PG exams, as well as the growing demand from the government to hold the NEET-UG exam again. The problem underscores our ongoing collective failure to establish a reliable and trustworthy method for assessing and evaluating candidates, specifically designed to enable a fair and consistent recruitment process based on merit. Although occurrences of paper leakage are not uncommon, the catastrophe underscores our failure to address this deficiency.

When seen from a broader and systematic standpoint, the problem emphasises the shortcomings of implementing temporary peripheral changes instead of restructuring and reorganising current systems at the logistical, planning, and operational levels. The establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA) in 2017, without any restructuring of institutional and operational processes at the local level, is a striking example. Despite ongoing praiseworthy efforts, such as the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, the situation persists in deteriorating, hence exacerbating the level of stress.

After the recent Lok Sabha elections, the opposition is actively attempting to politicise the issue and question the government. They are making every effort to achieve these aims. The administration has responded promptly and thoughtfully to the increasing number of examination conflicts that have been widely covered in the national media. The Minister of Education's acceptance of moral responsibility demonstrates the government's commitment to adopting a cautious and responsive strategy, as well as its understanding of the potential consequences that may arise from the matter.

By reporting the cases of NEET and NET to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a complete, unbiased, and merit-based probe, a proactive stance is shown. Furthermore, a committee has been formed to assess the frameworks and protocols and propose significant modifications. K Radhakrishnan, the former head of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), will lead this committee. The enactment of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act 2024, which incorporates strict penalties and substantial fines, is also aligned with the same objective.

### National Testing Agency

The NTA conducts entrance exams for admissions and fellowships to institutes of higher education in the country.

- The NTA was established in 2017.
- It has become one of the largest competitive exam testing agencies in the world today.
- It is mandated with creating an exam system that is scientific and at par with global standards.
- It is registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- It will relieve the CBSE, AICTE and other bodies from their exam-conducting responsibilities.

#### It now conducts:

- |                                    |                            |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • JEE (Main)                       | • Delhi University – Exams |
| • NCHMCT - JEE                     | • JNU EE                   |
| • Common Management Admission Test | • NEET – UG                |
| • IGNOU – Exams                    | • NEET-PG                  |
| • JNU – Exams                      | • GPAT                     |
|                                    | • CMAT                     |

- UGC – NET (assessment for fellowship)
- UGC-CSIR
- CUET – UG
- CUET – PG
- The NTA is administered by its Governing Body.
- The agency will have a team of education administrators, researchers, experts and assessment developers who believe that scientifically designed and rightly-delivered assessments can enhance the teaching-learning processes in classrooms in the country.
- The assessments undertaken by the NTA also intends to improve equity in India by ensuring that merit prevails in all selections.
- NTA's motto: "Excellence in Assessment".
- The agency's CEO will be called the Director-General and would be appointed by the Government.
- The NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist. He/she will be appointed by the Ministry of Human Resources.
- After the initial phase, the NTA will be financially self-sustaining.

### NTA Objectives

The objectives of the NTA are:

1. Conducting exams that are open to the public, efficient, and in accordance with international standards in order to evaluate the applicants' level of competence regarding admission and recruiting.
2. Conducting research on professional, educational, and testing systems in order to identify gaps in the knowledge systems and take measures to fill those gaps in order to bridge the knowledge gaps.
3. The process of constructing test questions involves locating specialists and organisations. In addition to conducting research on education and professional development standards, the production and dissemination of data is also included.

### Functions of the NTA

Identifying partner institutions from among the current schools and higher education institutions that have the infrastructure to permit the administration of online tests without disrupting their academic routines is a task that has to be accomplished.

- The development of a question bank that covers all topics by using the most recent methods. In addition to establishing a robust culture of research and development, the establishment of a pool of specialists in different elements of testing is critical.
- The provision of training and advising services to institutions, as well as assistance to individual colleges and universities in the field of testing.
- Our mission is to provide Indian academic institutions with high-quality testing services.
- Creating a contemporary testing culture in India by using the knowledge of both Indian and international professionals. In addition, working together with international organisations like the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to accomplish this goal has been necessary.

- Participating in any additional examination that may be requested by the federal or state government departments or ministries to be taken.
- Both the implementation of changes and the training of school boards and other authorities that are responsible for ensuring that the testing standards are comparable to those of entrance tests are required.

### **Stagnant Operational Framework**

In order to combat malicious behaviours, intentions, and designs, the National Testing Agency (NTA) was established based on the model of the United States' External Testing Service. In order to guarantee consistency, transparency, credibility, and dependability in assessment procedures, which are essential for preserving the system's integrity, the objective was to achieve this specific purpose.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was launched in 2017, the operating framework of the National Transportation Authority (NTA) has largely stayed same. It has been unable to keep pace with the ever-evolving but potentially dangerous technological advancements that have been introduced by unscrupulous forces who are constantly ready to outwit its preparation. The lack of initiatives to improve infrastructure, the inability to conduct necessary due diligence procedures both internally and externally, the inability to recruit permanent skilled personnel and experts, the inability to establish more well-equipped facilities, and the inability to enhance the competencies of its staff have all contributed to a cycle of substandard performance within the organisation.

One may easily see the level of nonchalance that is ingrained in its operating procedures. The National Testing Agency (NTA) has acknowledged that it has granted compensating points to some students in order to compensate for the time that they lost during this year's National Eligibility and Eligibility Test (NEET) test. However, the NTA has not used any organised or nuanced criterion for grace marks. Over the course of the previous six years, the trajectory of the agency has reflected this stagnation, with evidence of compromises, recurrent difficulties, and unprofessional conduct diminishing public faith in examination procedures.

### **Examining Controversy within the NEET maelstrom**

Following the Supreme Court's inquiry into allegations of irregularities in the NEET-UG exam, the Union government has decided to invalidate the scorecards of 1,563 NEET-UG 2024 candidates who received grace marks. These candidates will have the option to take a re-test.

The present cohort is characterised by an exceptionally large number of applicants, namely 67, who have achieved a perfect score of 720 in the NEET-UG examination.

The NEET examination, administered by the National Testing Agency (NTA), occurred on 5 May at 4,750 locations, with around 2.4 million applicants taking part. The findings, originally planned for publication on 14 June, were instead published ahead of schedule on 4 June as a consequence of accelerated assessment procedures. A total of 67 students achieved a perfect score of 720. Six kids from a facility in Faridabad, Haryana, were among them, giving rise to concerns of potential violations.

Following the subsequent public uproar, the NTA established a committee to tackle the concerns. The authorities are contemplating several alternatives, including conducting a retest for the 1,563 applicants who were awarded "grace marks" due to purported time limitations, or allowing students to retain their original results without the inclusion of the extra points.

This dispute exacerbates the pre-existing critiques about the NTA's management of national examinations like as JEE Main and NEET-UG. The occurrence of technical issues, inaccuracies in results, and claims of irregularities has emphasised the need for enhanced supervision and improvements in the administration of exams by the agency.

The Print provides a detailed explanation of the NTA, including its responsibilities and operational mechanisms.

### Controversies Surrounding the Agency

During the NEET (UG) 2020 test, the NTA erroneously announced that Vidhi Suryavanshi, hailing from Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, had obtained a mere 6 marks. However, it was subsequently revealed that this information was incorrect, but unfortunately, Suryavanshi had already tragically ended her own life. Vidhi's answer form indicated that she had achieved a total score of 590 marks.

In the same year, Mridul Rawat was first announced by the NTA to have obtained very low scores. Rawat challenged this judgement and, upon reassessment of his OMR sheet and answer key, it was discovered that he was really the highest-scoring student in the ST category nationwide.

Rawat, a native of Gangapur town in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, first received a score of 320 from the National Testing Agency (NTA). However, after reviewing his answer key, the 17-year-old was certain that he had achieved a higher score. As a result, he contacted the NTA via a post on the X platform. Subsequently, he got an email notifying him that he had achieved a score of 650 marks and was officially recognised as the top-scoring student in the Scheduled Tribes category throughout all of India. He received a second marksheet thereafter, which showed a total of 650 marks. However, he claims that the written representation of the marks still showed 350.

The NTA refuted Rawat's assertions, as the then director-general Vineet Joshi said that the alleged score of 650 was inaccurate, and that the complaint was being lodged with the cybersecurity unit in accordance with the IT Act.

The Print attempted to contact Joshi via phone calls, but, he declined to provide any comments about the issues and explicitly disassociated himself from any involvement in NTA proceedings. The NTA received extensive backlash for their mishandling of the JEE (Main) 2022 test, which caused technical difficulties for several candidates and subsequently led to reduced marks. Furthermore, there were also reports of malfunctions with the answer key and response sheets.

In 2024, the NTA faced criticism for suspected anomalies in the difficulty level of JEE (Main) question papers, resulting in the adjustment of marks and therefore, lower results for students.

Following the announcement of the results for the JEE Main 2024 Session 1, several students raised concerns about inaccuracies in percentile computation and an imbalanced distribution of applicants across different shifts. Several students have claimed that there were disparities between their JEE Main grades and the marks they really received. They argue that two of the shifts had a higher number of students compared to the others, which resulted in these discrepancies.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) has said that the computer uses a normalisation method to randomly assign test dates, shifts, and slots. They stressed that question papers with comparable substance were created and randomly distributed to each shift, without previous awareness of their difficulty levels.

NTA states that the different degrees of difficulty in question papers are a natural part of multi-shift exams, and that there is no direct correlation between raw and normalised grades. The normalisation procedure, which utilises percentile scores, is implemented to guarantee fairness among all candidates, irrespective of the difficulty level of the exam. The JEE (Main) 2024 Session 1 was conducted in adherence to established norms and procedures for high-stakes examinations, ensuring equal opportunities for all candidates.

During the April session of the JEE test, the NTA documented one instance of impersonation and nine instances of cheating or using improper methods.

The agency said that it used AI-enabled surveillance and biometric verification to identify offenders. As a result, 39 applicants were banned for a period of three years owing to their participation in unfair activities.

## Strategies

The National Transportation Authority (NTA) has the potential to considerably improve its capacity to avoid paper leaks by the implementation of computer-based tests that make use of new technologies and the creation of a dispersed physical state of the computer-based testing centres located at premier institutions around the nation. Through the use of sophisticated encryption techniques, it is possible to ensure the safety of the transmission of examination papers, therefore preventing unauthorised access and changes. Additionally, the presence of these centres in centrally funded technical institutes (CFTI) would instill faith in both the students and the parents of those kids.

The use of AI-driven systems to perform real-time monitoring of the centres allows for the detection of abnormalities and suspicious actions, hence reducing the chance of security breaches. Additionally, the use of AI into the review procedures has the potential to automate and speed evaluations, reduce the likelihood of human mistake, and guarantee transparency.

The combination of these technologies not only improves the security framework of the National Testing Agency (NTA), but it also helps to maintain the confidence and credibility of the testing system in other countries. Keeping the integrity of its testing procedures, restoring confidence among stakeholders, and providing equal chances for all applicants are all things that the National Testing Agency (NTA) is able to do via the use of digital examination platforms that are safe, transparent, and scalable.

Pradeep Singh Kharola has been selected as the new leader of the National Terrorism Agency (NTA) by the government, which has acknowledged the seriousness of the issue. Kharola is also the chairman of the National Recruitment Agency (NRA), which is responsible for administering a Common Eligibility Test (CET) to candidates for Group C and Group D employee positions in all enterprises that fall under the purview of the federal government. Furthermore, in order to improve examination procedures, a committee that will be led by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, who was formerly the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, has been established.

## Looking Forward

When dealing with the circumstance, it is important to treat it with careful thinking rather than making snap judgements right away. In the first place, the organisation has to be reinforced by acquiring a sturdy infrastructure and sufficient manpower in order to carry out extensive examinations. To guarantee that the National Transportation Authority (NTA) functions in a manner that is efficient, transparent, and accountable, it is necessary to develop processes that are robust and rigorous, as well as to undertake consultations and assessments. The practice of continuously improving its procedures is of the utmost importance, and the collection of frequent feedback from students and teachers may help identify areas that need development and push changes that are essential.

In addition to this, it is of the utmost importance to build strong support networks for the students who have been harmed and to make certain that their futures are not jeopardised as a result of systemic failures. These kinds of safeguards are very necessary in order to preserve the honesty and dependability of the examination system while also protecting the interests of all of the players involved.



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