

The Impact of NEP 2020 on Higher Education in India: Current Trends and Future Directions

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant transformation of India's higher education system, aiming to make it more multidisciplinary, flexible, inclusive, skill-oriented, and globally competitive. This paper examines the impact of NEP 2020 on higher education by analysing current implementation trends and emerging future directions. Major reforms include multidisciplinary curricula, multiple entry and exit options, the Academic Bank of Credits, four-year undergraduate programmes, vocational education, technology-enabled learning, research promotion, institutional autonomy, and internationalisation. These initiatives have encouraged universities and colleges to redesign academic programmes and adopt student-centred and outcome-based approaches. The policy also seeks to improve access and equity by expanding digital education and increasing opportunities for learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. However, implementation continues to face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, faculty shortages, the digital divide, uneven institutional preparedness, funding limitations, and differences in state-level adoption. The study concludes that NEP 2020 has the potential to create a more innovative and responsive higher education ecosystem, but its success will depend on sustained investment, effective coordination, faculty development, reliable digital infrastructure, and continuous monitoring. Future reforms should focus on ensuring equitable implementation, strengthening research capacity, improving industry-academia collaboration, and maintaining academic quality across institutions.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary Education, Academic Bank of Credits, Educational Technology, Institutional Autonomy, Skill Development, India

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift in India's approach to education, particularly higher education, by seeking to create a more flexible, multidisciplinary, inclusive, and research-oriented system. Approved by the Government of India in July 2020, NEP 2020 replaced the National Policy on Education, 1986, after more than three decades and introduced a comprehensive framework for transforming the educational landscape. In higher education, the policy emphasizes holistic learning, multidisciplinary education, institutional autonomy, academic and research excellence, skill development, technological integration, and equitable access. It also proposes increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035, alongside mechanisms such as multiple entry and exit options and the Academic Bank of Credits to promote flexibility and student mobility (Aithal & Kakde,

2024). The implementation of NEP 2020 has the potential to reshape Indian higher education by moving beyond conventional, discipline-specific and examination-oriented approaches toward learner-centred and interdisciplinary education. Kumar et al. (2021) argue that the policy provides a comprehensive framework capable of responding to changing technological, economic, and societal requirements. Similarly, Das Gupta and Bhattacharya (2022) highlight the importance of examining NEP 2020 in relation to equitable access, particularly in addressing persistent inequalities within higher education. At the same time, translating the policy's ambitious objectives into practice involves challenges related to institutional capacity, faculty preparedness, infrastructure, digital access, funding, and coordination among stakeholders. Therefore, examining the present implementation and future implications of NEP 2020 is essential for understanding its potential contribution to the quality, accessibility, relevance, and internationalisation of Indian higher education. This paper examines the implementation, emerging impact, challenges, and future prospects of NEP 2020 in transforming higher education in India.

NEP 2020 in India: A light on the literature

The literature on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights its potential to bring structural and pedagogical transformation to Indian higher education. Kumar, Prakash, and Singh (2021) describe NEP 2020 as a comprehensive framework aimed at making education more multidisciplinary, flexible, skill-oriented, and responsive to emerging societal and economic needs. Aithal and Aithal (2020) examine the policy's higher-education provisions and emphasize institutional autonomy, multidisciplinary learning, research, technology integration, and improved access as important mechanisms for achieving its objectives. Studies have also drawn attention to the challenges associated with implementation. These include inadequate infrastructure, faculty development, digital disparities, financial constraints, and the need for effective coordination among educational institutions and regulatory bodies. DasGupta and Bhattacharya (2022) particularly emphasize the importance of examining NEP 2020 from the perspective of equitable access to higher education. Overall, existing literature suggests that while NEP 2020 provides an ambitious framework for transforming Indian higher education, its long-term impact will depend substantially on effective implementation, adequate resources, institutional preparedness, and inclusive participation.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis adopted in this study is descriptive in nature and is based entirely on secondary data. The data have been collected from relevant secondary sources, such as published reports, research articles, books, government publications, and other reliable sources. The collected data are analyzed and interpreted descriptively to identify and present the key trends, patterns, and findings related to the study. The website and relevant data from Ministry of Education, Govt. of India and NITI Aayog data base is consulted to carry forward the study.

Discussion and Analysis

NEP 2020 and Its Significance in the Context of Indian Higher Education: An Overview

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a comprehensive and transformative framework for restructuring the education system in India, with particular emphasis on improving the accessibility, quality, affordability, and equity of higher education. Introduced with the objective of addressing several longstanding challenges within the Indian education system, the policy seeks to create an inclusive, flexible, multidisciplinary, and learner-centred educational environment. It envisions an education system that is not only aligned with global standards and emerging socioeconomic requirements but is also responsive to India's diverse cultural, social, linguistic, and economic contexts. In this regard, NEP 2020 places considerable emphasis on expanding access to higher education, strengthening institutional quality, promoting multidisciplinary learning, and encouraging research and innovation.

A significant feature of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on social justice, equity, and inclusion. The policy recognizes that historical inequalities and socioeconomic disparities continue to influence educational opportunities, particularly for students belonging to marginalized and disadvantaged communities. By seeking to reduce barriers to participation and improve access to quality educational institutions, NEP 2020 underscores the role of higher education as an important instrument for promoting social mobility and inclusive development. This dimension is particularly significant in the context of postcolonial India, where social diversity, regional disparities, gender inequalities, and socioeconomic hierarchies continue to shape educational outcomes and opportunities (Pereppadan Poulose, 2021).

The policy also gives considerable importance to skill development, vocational education, and employability. By encouraging the integration of vocational education with mainstream academic learning, NEP 2020 seeks to bridge the gap between education and the requirements of the labour market. Such initiatives are particularly relevant for enhancing employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and economic participation among young people and women. The emphasis on women's education and skill development is especially important because greater participation of women in education and productive economic activities can contribute to household welfare, labour-force participation, and broader sustainable economic growth (Parveen, 2023).

Furthermore, NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary and holistic education, greater institutional autonomy, the use of technology in education, and the strengthening of research and innovation. These measures reflect an attempt to move beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries and develop graduates with broader knowledge, critical-thinking abilities, practical skills, and adaptability. The policy therefore positions higher education not merely as a means of acquiring academic qualifications but as an important mechanism for developing human capital and supporting India's long-term socioeconomic transformation.

Current Impact of NEP 2020 on Higher Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is bringing substantial changes to the higher education system in India by promoting greater flexibility, inclusiveness, interdisciplinarity, and learner-centred education. One of the major objectives of the policy is to move away from rigid disciplinary boundaries and conventional academic structures that often restrict students from exploring diverse areas of knowledge. By encouraging multidisciplinary and holistic

learning, NEP 2020 provides students with greater flexibility to choose subjects across different disciplines and develop a broader range of academic and practical competencies. Such an approach is intended to make higher education more responsive to the changing requirements of society, industry, and the global economy.

Another important area of transformation is the reorientation of teaching, learning, and assessment practices. The policy encourages higher educational institutions to move beyond examination-oriented education and adopt assessment mechanisms that evaluate students' understanding, analytical abilities, creativity, and practical application of knowledge. The greater emphasis on continuous and comprehensive assessment is intended to provide a more meaningful evaluation of students' learning rather than relying predominantly on end-semester or final examinations. The semester-based academic structure and continuous evaluation mechanisms can therefore contribute to a more consistent engagement of students with the learning process (Jagadeesh, 2020).

NEP 2020 also gives considerable importance to research, innovation, and knowledge creation as essential components of a strong higher education system. By encouraging research-oriented teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and stronger institutional research capacity, the policy seeks to improve the overall quality and relevance of higher education in India. These initiatives are particularly significant in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy, where universities are expected not only to impart knowledge but also to contribute to technological advancement, problem-solving, and socioeconomic development.

Table 1: Progress in the Implementation of NEP 2020 in India

Major Area of NEP 2020	Key Implementation Initiative / Progress	Status / Achievement Reported by Govt. of India	Official Source
Multidisciplinary and flexible higher education	Introduction of the National Credit Framework (NCrF) and National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF)	Frameworks introduced to facilitate multidisciplinary learning, flexible curricula, credit transfer and mobility	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)	Establishment of ABC for accumulation and transfer of academic credits	2,275 Universities/Institutes of National Importance/HEIs onboarded and 31.27 crore students registered, including school APAAR IDs	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Multiple Entry and Exit (MEES)	Implementation of multiple entry and exit provisions in higher education	153 universities reported providing multiple-entry facilities; 31,156 UG and 5,583 PG students had availed the facility	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Biannual admission system	Provision for admissions in two academic sessions	Higher education institutions can admit students in July/August and January/February sessions	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Digital and online learning	Expansion of SWAYAM and online/ODL education	331 universities had adopted SWAYAM courses, with cumulative enrolment exceeding 4.32 crore and approximately 10 lakh certifications annually	Ministry of Education, Government of India

Digital governance	Adoption of the SAMARTH ERP platform	5,417 Universities/HEIs had adopted SAMARTH for technology-enabled institutional and student-life-cycle governance	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Industry–academia linkage	Introduction of Professor of Practice, apprenticeship/internship guidelines and Research & Development Cells	10,578 HEIs reported under the relevant industry-academia/research initiatives	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Indian languages in higher education	Translation and development of educational materials in Indian languages	Entrance examinations including JEE, NEET and CUET are conducted in multiple Indian languages; UG and technical books have also been translated	Ministry of Education, Government of India
School education transformation	PM SHRI Schools established as exemplar institutions demonstrating NEP 2020 principles	The scheme targets more than 14,500 schools and is being implemented during 2022–23 to 2026–27	Ministry of Education, PM SHRI
Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)	NIPUN Bharat Mission launched to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy	FLN implementation undertaken through state/UT action plans, DIKSHA resources, teacher training and foundational learning initiatives	Ministry of Education, NIPUN Bharat
Teacher education	Introduction of the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP)	Recognition granted to 42 institutions for the 2023–24 academic session, including IITs, NITs, RIEs, IGNOU and government colleges	Ministry of Education, Government of India
Research and innovation	Establishment of Research & Development Cells in HEIs	UGC guidelines introduced to institutionalise research and development activities within higher education institutions	UGC
Social inclusion and equity	Guidelines for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs)	UGC issued guidelines in 2024 to promote equitable opportunities for SEDGs in HEIs	UGC
Multidisciplinary institutions	Guidelines for transforming HEIs into multidisciplinary institutions	UGC issued specific guidelines in 2022 for the transformation of HEIs	UGC
Internationalisation	Guidelines for internationalisation of higher education	UGC introduced guidelines covering internationalisation and global engagement of Indian HEIs	UGC
Indian Knowledge System (IKS)	Integration of Indian knowledge and cultural traditions into higher education	UGC issued guidelines on incorporating Indian Knowledge in higher education curricula and faculty orientation	UGC

Source: The Author

The implementation of NEP 2020 demonstrates widespread institutional adoption and systemic transformation across India's education sector. Digital governance and credit mobility have achieved massive scale, driven by 5,417 HEIs adopting the SAMARTH ERP platform and over 31.27 crore students registered under the Academic Bank of Credit, alongside 4.32 crore

cumulative enrollments in SWAYAM online courses. Structural flexibility has taken root through the introduction of frameworks like NCrF, NHEQF, and Multiple Entry and Exit Systems (operationalized across 153 universities), complemented by strong industry-academia linkages involving 10,578 HEIs. Furthermore, foundational and inclusive reforms are actively advancing nationwide, highlighted by the NIPUN Bharat mission for foundational literacy, the targeted rollout of over 14,500 PM SHRI schools, the launch of 42 institutions under the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), and the issuance of UGC guidelines supporting Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and Indian languages.

Issues Related to Funding, Infrastructure, and Faculty Training

The effective implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India's higher education sector is closely associated with the availability of adequate funding, modern infrastructure, and continuous faculty development. Although NEP 2020 envisions a significant transformation of higher education through multidisciplinary learning, research, digital education, and improved institutional autonomy, many institutions continue to face financial constraints that limit their ability to implement these reforms effectively. Insufficient public expenditure and unequal distribution of resources particularly affect state universities and colleges located in rural and economically disadvantaged regions, where basic academic and research facilities remain inadequate (Chattopadhyay, 2024). Infrastructure is another major concern. Several higher education institutions require improvements in classrooms, laboratories, libraries, hostels, internet connectivity, digital learning facilities, and research infrastructure to support the flexible and technology-oriented learning environment envisaged by NEP 2020. The expansion of digital education has also highlighted the persistent digital divide, particularly among students and institutions with limited access to reliable internet and technological resources (Ministry of Education, 2020). Furthermore, successful pedagogical reform depends substantially on the preparedness of faculty members. Teachers need regular training in innovative teaching methodologies, outcome-based education, multidisciplinary approaches, digital tools, research methods, and student-centred learning. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has accordingly emphasized continuous professional development and capacity building of teachers as important components of higher education reform (UGC, 2022). However, opportunities for systematic and high-quality faculty training remain uneven across institutions. Therefore, merely introducing policy provisions without strengthening financial support, physical and digital infrastructure, and faculty capabilities may create a significant gap between policy objectives and actual implementation. Addressing these interconnected challenges through increased and equitable funding, infrastructure modernization, digital investment, and institutionalized faculty development programmes is essential for realizing the transformative objectives of NEP 2020 in Indian higher education.

Future Prospects of NEP 2020 in Higher Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has the potential to bring substantial changes to India's higher education system by promoting greater flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, research orientation, technological integration, and institutional autonomy. One of its major future prospects is the development of a more flexible academic structure in which students

can choose courses across disciplines and benefit from multiple entry and exit options. The expansion of the Academic Bank of Credits is also expected to facilitate credit transfer and mobility between institutions. NEP 2020 further places strong emphasis on strengthening research and innovation through institutions such as the National Research Foundation, which can encourage collaboration among universities, industries, and research organisations (Ministry of Education, 2020). Another important prospect is the increasing integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning. Online education, blended learning, digital resources, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence can improve access to quality educational content, particularly for students in geographically disadvantaged areas. The policy also provides scope for the internationalisation of Indian higher education through greater collaboration with foreign universities, international student mobility, joint research, and dual or joint degree programmes. Furthermore, the emphasis on vocational education, internships, entrepreneurship, and industry-academia collaboration may improve the employability and practical skills of graduates. Faculty development is likely to become another important area, with greater emphasis on continuous professional development and innovative teaching practices. NEP 2020 also provides opportunities for higher education institutions to become more multidisciplinary and autonomous, potentially strengthening their academic and research capacity. However, the realization of these prospects will depend on sustained financial investment, effective institutional coordination, adequate infrastructure, trained faculty, and equitable access to digital resources. Thus, the future of NEP 2020 in higher education will largely depend on how effectively its policy objectives are translated into institutional practices across different regions and categories of institutions.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant shift in the direction of higher education in India, moving beyond a conventional degree-oriented system towards one that emphasizes multidisciplinary, flexibility, research, skills, innovation, inclusion, and lifelong learning. The policy seeks to address long-standing concerns related to access, equity, quality, employability, and institutional fragmentation by promoting multidisciplinary institutions, multiple entry and exit options, the Academic Bank of Credits, vocational integration, digital learning, and greater institutional autonomy.

A major strength of NEP 2020 is its attempt to connect higher education with the changing requirements of the economy and society. Greater interaction between universities, industries, research institutions, and communities can improve students' practical skills, employability, entrepreneurship, and capacity for innovation. The policy's emphasis on research and internationalisation also provides an opportunity to strengthen India's position within the global knowledge economy. Current implementation initiatives include the Academic Bank of Credits, internationalisation measures, digital education initiatives, and institutional research and development cells, indicating that several elements of the policy are moving from vision towards implementation.

At the same time, the transformation envisaged by NEP 2020 cannot be achieved through policy reform alone. Adequate funding, modern physical and digital infrastructure, qualified

faculty, continuous professional development, effective governance, and coordination between the Centre, States, and higher education institutions will remain essential. The Ministry of Education itself recognises that effective implementation requires systematic coordination and continuous course correction. Moreover, ensuring that the benefits of reform reach students from rural areas, economically weaker sections, disadvantaged communities, and underserved regions will be crucial for translating the policy's emphasis on equity and inclusion into practice.

Thus, NEP 2020 provides a broad framework for reshaping Indian higher education into a more inclusive, flexible, innovative, multidisciplinary, and globally connected system. Its long-term significance will ultimately depend not only on the comprehensiveness of its provisions but also on the consistency and quality of their implementation. If the existing challenges are addressed through sustained investment, institutional capacity building, faculty development, technological advancement, and evidence-based policy monitoring, NEP 2020 can contribute substantially to building India's knowledge economy and supporting the country's broader development aspirations towards 2047. Thus, the success of NEP 2020 should be understood as a continuing process of institutional transformation rather than a one-time policy intervention.

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