

Transforming Higher Education in India under NEP 2020: A Critical Perspective.

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a comprehensive framework for transforming higher education in India. This paper critically examines the major reforms proposed under NEP 2020, including multidisciplinary education, flexible curriculum design, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), and the promotion of research and innovation. The policy also emphasizes quality assurance, internationalization, and the integration of vocational education into mainstream learning. These reforms aim to create a learner-centric, flexible, and globally competitive education system aligned with the demands of the 21st century. The study highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing NEP 2020 and its potential impact on restructuring India's higher education landscape.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary Learning, Academic Bank of Credits, Curriculum Flexibility, Quality Assurance, Educational Reform.

Introduction :

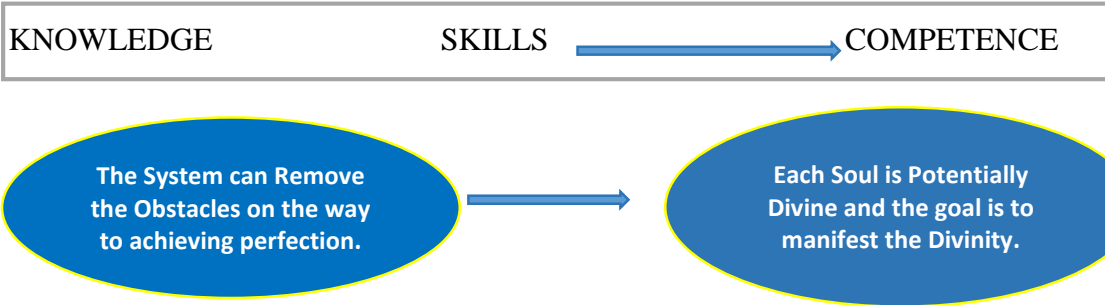
Higher education plays a vital role in shaping both individuals and society. It not only helps in developing knowledge and skills but also contributes to building a democratic, just, and inclusive nation. In the context of India, higher education is seen as a key driver for social progress, economic growth, and national development.

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant turning point in the Indian education system. It is the first comprehensive education policy of the twenty-first century that aims to bring major reforms across all levels of education, especially higher education. The policy seeks to create an education system that is aligned with the needs and aspirations of modern society while also respecting India's rich cultural values and traditions.

NEP 2020 is closely connected with global educational goals, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The policy emphasizes a learner-centred approach, where the focus is not only on acquiring knowledge but also on developing skills, competencies, and critical thinking abilities.

In the context of higher education, NEP 2020 introduces several transformative changes such as multidisciplinary learning, flexible curriculum structures, the Academic Bank of Credits, and a strong emphasis on research and innovation. These reforms aim to make the education system more flexible, holistic, and globally competitive.

However, despite its visionary approach, the successful implementation of NEP 2020 remains a major challenge. Therefore, it is important to critically examine how far this policy can truly transform higher education in India. This study attempts to analyse the key features, opportunities, and challenges associated with the transformation of higher education under NEP 2020.



❖ **Rational of the study:**

The study titled “Transforming Higher Education in India under NEP 2020: A Critical Perspective” critically examines the structural reforms introduced through National Education Policy 2020 in the context of higher education. While the policy envisions a flexible, multidisciplinary, and globally competitive education system, significant challenges persist in its effective implementation. These include limitations related to infrastructure, faculty preparedness, and institutional capacity. Moreover, existing literature largely remains descriptive, with limited critical evaluation of the policy’s practical impact. Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy intent and ground realities by assessing the trans-formative potential of NEP 2020 in reshaping higher education in India.

❖ **Review of Related Studies:**

Sr. No.	Title	Year	Authors/ Agency	Research Methodology	Aims and Objectives	Key Findings
1	Implementation of NEP 2020 in Indian Universities	2023	UGC Report	Descriptive	To assess NEP implementation	Found slow adoption due to institutional limitations
2	Multidisciplinary Education in India	2023	Sharma & Verma	Qualitative	To analyse multidisciplinary approach	Enhances holistic learning but needs structural change
3	Curriculum Reforms under NEP 2020	2024	NCERT	Analytical	To study curriculum flexibility	Flexibility improves student choice and engagement
4	Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) in India	2024	Banerjee & Das	Case Study	To evaluate ABC system	Promotes mobility but lacks awareness
5	Teacher Preparedness for NEP 2020	2024	NCTE	Survey	Teacher Preparedness for NEP 2020	Training gaps identified among faculty
6	Digital Learning in Higher Education	2024	IIT Delhi Study Group	Mixed Method	To analyse digital adoption.	Digital divide remains a major challenge
7	Quality Assurance in Higher Education	2025	NAAC	Analytical	To evaluate quality reforms	Need stronger regulatory mechanisms

8	Vocational Education Integration	2025	Singh & Kaur	Qualitative	To study vocational inclusion	Social perception is a major barrier
9	Internationalization of Indian Education	2025	AIU Report	Descriptive	To assess global competitiveness	Limited foreign collaboration exists
10	Challenges in NEP 2020 Implementation	2025	Kumar & Rao	Survey	To identify key challenges	Infrastructure and funding issues dominate

➤ In conclusion, the reviewed literature indicates that NEP 2020 provides a progressive framework for holistic and globally relevant education, but its success depends on addressing practical challenges and ensuring quality implementation.

❖ Research Gaps:

While the National Education Policy 2020 presents a comprehensive framework for transforming higher education in India, existing studies reveal several limitations in capturing its practical and long-term implications. A critical examination of recent literature highlights the following research gaps:

- There is a predominant focus on descriptive analysis, with limited studies offering a critical evaluation of the actual impact of NEP 2020 on higher education transformation.
- Empirical research on the institutional-level implementation of NEP 2020 remains inadequate, particularly across diverse higher education contexts in India.
- The interrelationship among key reforms—such as multidisciplinary education, curriculum flexibility, and Academic Bank of Credits—has not been sufficiently explored in an integrated manner.
- There is insufficient attention to the structural and operational challenges, including faculty preparedness, infrastructural constraints, and governance issues affecting implementation.
- Limited research exists on the long-term outcomes of NEP 2020, especially in terms of employability, skill development, and global competitiveness.

❖ Objectives:

1. To critically examine the key features of NEP 2020 in the context of higher education in India.
2. To analyse the implications of NEP 2020 for curriculum design and development.
3. To explore the restructuring of the higher education system under NEP 2020.
4. To identify challenges in the implementation of NEP 2020.

❖ Research Questions:

- RQ1: What are the key features of NEP 2020 in transforming higher education in India?**
RQ2: How does NEP 2020 influence curriculum design and development in higher education?
RQ3: In what ways does NEP 2020 restructure the higher education system in India?
RQ4: What are the major challenges in the effective implementation of NEP 2020 in higher education?

❖ Methodology:

1. Research Design:

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design. It is primarily based on a critical analysis of policy documents, research articles, and reports related to higher education reforms under NEP 2020. The study aims to examine the transformation of higher education in India from a conceptual and analytical perspective.

2. Nature of the Study:

This study is analytical and interpretative in nature. It focuses on understanding the key features, structural changes, and implementation challenges of NEP 2020 in higher education.

3. Sources of Data:

a) Secondary Data:

The study is based entirely on secondary sources of data, including:

Official policy documents of NEP 2020 Reports from international organizations (UNESCO, World Bank, OECD) Peer-reviewed journal articles (2024–2025)

Government publications and educational reports Books and academic literature related to higher education.

4. Data Collection Method:

Relevant literature and documents were collected through:

Academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, JSTOR) Official websites of government and international organizations Recent research publications related to NEP 2020.

5. Data Analysis Technique

- The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis.
- Key themes identified include:
 - Multidisciplinary education
 - Curriculum flexibility
 - Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)
 - Research and innovation
 - Quality assurance

➤ Implementation challenges:

A critical perspective was applied to evaluate both the strengths and limitations of NEP 2020.

6. Scope of the Study:

The study focuses on:

- Higher education sector in India
- Key reforms introduced under NEP 2020
- Structural and functional transformation of institutions

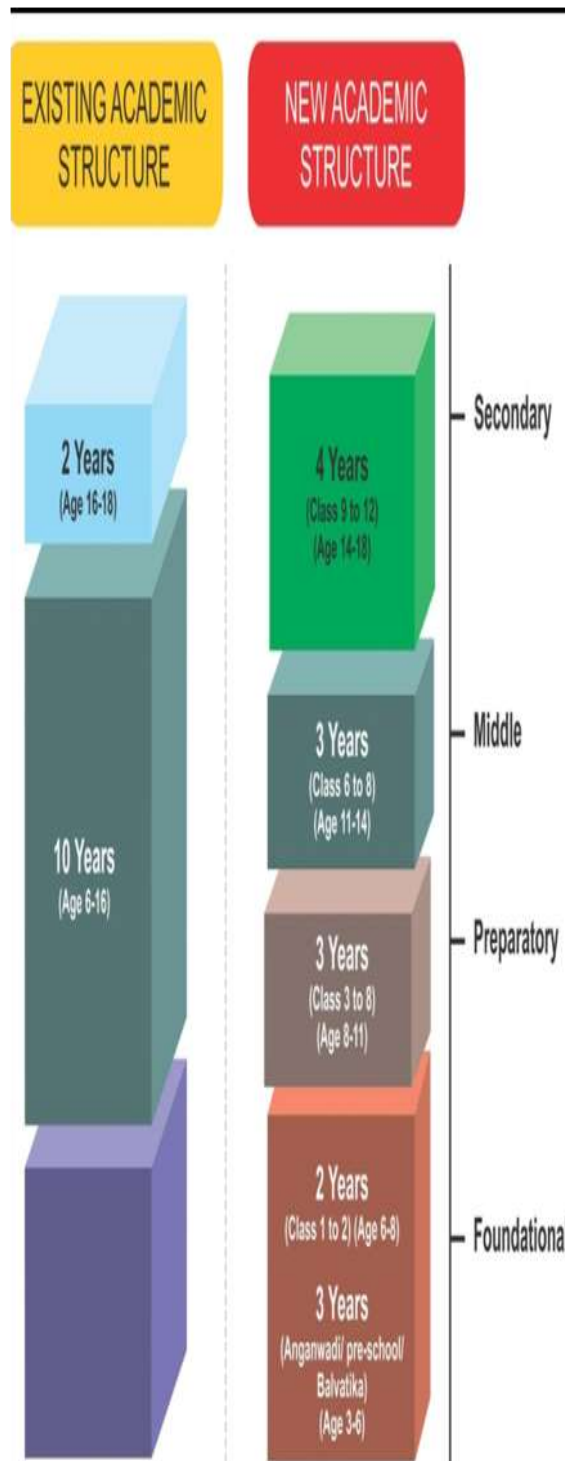
7. Limitations of the Study:

- ❖ The study is based only on secondary data
- ❖ No primary data (survey/interview) is used
- ❖ Findings depend on the availability of recent literature

✧ Practical implementation aspects may vary across institutions

❖ **Teaching Approach by Stage (5+3+3+4):** This replaces the old 10+2 system and is based on age groups and learning stages, not just classes.

- **Secondary Stage (4 years)**
 Age: 14–18 years
 Classes: 9 to 12
 Focus: Multidisciplinary subject choice (no strict division) Critical thinking & based education.
 ➤ Students can choose
 Physics + Music
 Math + Political Science
- **Middle Stage (3 years)**
 Age: 11–14 years
 Classes: 6 to 8
 Focus: Experiential learning, Subjects Science, Mathematics, Social Science, Logical thinking & understanding
 ➤ Students start thinking
- **Preparatory Stage (3 years)**
 Age: 8–11 years
 Classes: 3 to 5
 Focus: Discovery-based classrooms, Introduction to reading, maths, arts.
 ➤ Transition from play → more
- **Foundational Stage (5 years)**
 Age: 3–8 years
 Classes: 3 years of Anganwadi / Pre-Class 1 & 2
 Focus: Play-based learning, Activity-based teaching, Language development, Basic literacy & numeracy,
 ➤ Learning here is fun,



learning, Flexibility in Science/Commerce/Arts problem-solving, Skill-

combinations like:

introduced clearly: Arts & Humanities, analytically

learning, Interactive writing, speaking, science, structured learning

school,

interactive, and stress-free

(Higher Education –

❖ **Stage-wise Restructuring NEP 2020):**

- Colleges will be given graded autonomy based on accreditation
- Institutions will be mentored and supported to improve quality
- Colleges can become:
 - Teaching-intensive universities
 - Research-intensive universities
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will have freedom to upgrade categories
- Focus on quality, flexibility, and innovation

❖ **Strategies to Increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER):**

The enhancement of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education is a key objective of the National Education Policy 2020, aiming to ensure equitable access, inclusivity, and quality in the education system (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The policy emphasizes the expansion of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in underserved regions to reduce disparities and improve access (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2023). Furthermore, it proposes that by 2030, at least one multidisciplinary HEI in every district will be established to strengthen institutional capacity (Ministry of Education, 2020).

In addition, the development of institutions offering instruction in local or Indian languages is encouraged to enhance inclusivity and student participation (National Education Policy, 2020). The integration of vocational education into higher education is also highlighted as a means to increase enrolment and improve employability (All India Council for Technical Education [AICTE], 2024).

The policy also supports the equitable growth of public institutions through transparent accreditation systems, ensuring quality and accountability (National Assessment and Accreditation Council [NAAC], 2025). Moreover, accredited institutions are allowed to offer Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online programmes, thereby widening access and flexibility in higher education (UGC, 2023).

- These initiatives collectively aim to significantly increase GER and promote a more inclusive and accessible higher education system in India.

❖ **Regulatory Reforms for Autonomy and Institutional Transformation:**

The National Education Policy 2020 proposes a comprehensive restructuring of the regulatory framework in higher education to promote autonomy, innovation, and institutional excellence. The new regulatory architecture is designed to create an enabling environment that fosters academic freedom and decentralized decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2020).

A significant reform is the gradual phasing out of the traditional affiliated college system, to be implemented over a period of fifteen years through a mechanism of graded autonomy (UGC, 2023). Under this system, affiliated colleges are expected to achieve defined accreditation benchmarks and evolve into autonomous, degree-granting institutions, thereby enhancing quality and accountability (NAAC, 2025).

This transformation will be supported through structured mentoring, capacity-building initiatives, and governmental assistance, ensuring a smooth transition for institutions across different levels of development (Ministry of Education, 2020). Furthermore, the policy seeks to simplify the complex classification of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by introducing a uniform institutional identity as 'universities', subject to the fulfilment of prescribed standards and norms (UGC, 2023).

- Overall, these regulatory reforms aim to build a more transparent, flexible, and quality-driven higher education system that aligns with global standards.

❖ **The restructuring of higher education under NEP 2020 includes the following key points:**



❖ **Benefits of Multidisciplinary Approach:**

1. Holistic Education in Institutions:

Engineering institutions like IITs will adopt a multidisciplinary curriculum by integrating arts and humanities, which helps students develop a broader perspective and become well-rounded individuals.(NEP 2020, MoE)

2. Cross-Disciplinary Learning:

Students from different streams will study subjects outside their core areas along with vocational and soft skills, making them more flexible, skilled, and adaptable in real-life situations.(NEP 2020, UGC)

3. Flexible Curriculum and Subject Choice:

The curriculum will provide multiple entry and exit options and allow students to choose interdisciplinary combinations based on their interests, promoting personalized learning paths.(NEP 2020, NCERT)

4. Removal of Rigid Boundaries:

The traditional separation between streams like Science, Commerce, and Arts will be removed, encouraging lifelong learning and giving students the freedom to explore diverse career options.(NEP 2020, NCERT)

5. Promotion of Multidisciplinary Research:

Higher education institutions will support multidisciplinary education and research at all levels, encouraging collaboration across academia, government, and industry to drive innovation and problem-solving.(NEP 2020, IITs)

❖ **NEP 2020: Key Reforms in Higher Education:**

➤ **Flexible Curriculum**

The National Education Policy 2020 introduces a flexible curriculum that empowers students to choose subjects according to their interests, abilities, and career goals. The curriculum is designed to remain dynamic and relevant to the evolving demands of the job market, ensuring that learners acquire practical and future-ready skills.

➤ **Academic Credit Bank (ABC)**

The policy proposes the creation of an Academic Credit Bank (ABC), a digital system that stores academic credits earned by students from different institutions. This allows learners to transfer credits easily and continue their education without interruption, promoting flexibility and mobility in higher education.

❖ Objectives of ABC

- Promotes national-level student mobility
- Facilitates multidisciplinary higher education
- Allows breaks in education without loss of progress
- Enables credit transfer between institutions
- Supports multiple entry and exit options
- Offers wide choice of courses to students

❖ Research and Innovation

NEP 2020 places strong emphasis on research and innovation by encouraging universities to form research clusters. These clusters foster collaboration among scholars and promote creative problem-solving, contributing to national development.

❖ Quality Assurance

To maintain high standards in education, the policy proposes the establishment of a regulatory body to ensure quality and accountability in higher education institutions. This will help institutions meet prescribed academic standards and improve overall educational outcomes.

❖ Internationalization of Education

The policy aims to make Indian higher education globally competitive by encouraging collaboration with foreign universities. It allows reputed international institutions to establish campuses in India and motivates Indian institutions to expand globally.

- NEP 2020 and Global Collaboration
- Provision for foreign students in Indian institutions
- Entrance tests for international admissions
- Research and teaching collaborations
- Faculty and student exchange programmes
- Mutually beneficial MoUs with foreign universities
- Permission for top global universities to operate in India
- Recognition of credits earned abroad

❖ Vocationalisation of Education:

NEP 2020 integrates vocational education into mainstream learning by introducing skill-based courses from an early stage. It focuses on practical knowledge, employability, and real-world skills, preparing students for diverse career opportunities.

The National Education Policy 2020 marks a transformative shift in India's education system by promoting flexibility, innovation, global exposure, and skill development. It aims to create a modern, inclusive, and future-ready education framework.

❖ Vocational Education under NEP 2020:

❖ Concept of Vocational Education

The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the importance of vocational education by integrating it into mainstream education. This approach aims to make learning more practical, skill-oriented, and aligned with the demands of the modern job market.

➤ Vocationalisation of Education

NEP 2020 seeks to develop a skill-based education system with locally relevant and indigenously developed content. It ensures accessibility through multiple learning modes, including classroom teaching and open distance learning.

■ Key Features of Vocational Education

1. Practice-Based Curriculum

A hands-on, practice-oriented curriculum will be introduced, especially for students in Grades 6–8, to enhance real-world skills and experiential learning.

2. Skill Gap Analysis

Efforts will be made to identify local skill gaps and employment opportunities, ensuring that education is aligned with regional economic needs.

3. Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Vocational courses will also be offered through flexible modes like open and distance learning, increasing accessibility for all learners.

4. Early Exposure to Skills

By 2025, at least 50% of learners will have exposure to vocational education, helping students explore different career paths from an early stage.

5. Promotion of Lok Vidya

Traditional knowledge and skills (Lok Vidya), developed within local communities, will be recognized and integrated into the education system.

6. National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)

The National Skills Qualification Framework will be further strengthened to define skill levels clearly for different disciplines and ensure standardization.

7. Learning from Vocational Experts

Students (Grades 6–8) will learn practical skills from local experts such as carpenters, potters, gardeners, and artists, connecting education with real-life profession

8. Internship Opportunities

Students will be provided with internship opportunities to gain hands-on experience and develop employability skills.

The National Education Policy 2020 transforms vocational education by making it an integral part of mainstream learning, thereby promoting skill development, employability, and self-reliance among students.

❖ Discussion:

NEP 2020 & Internationalization:

- Universities will get freedom in curriculum design, courses, and assessment, making education more innovative.
- The National Research Foundation (NRF) will fund research in both public and private institutions.
- Top Indian universities will be encouraged to open campuses abroad.
- The world's top 100 universities will be allowed to operate in India.
- The Academic Credit Bank (ABC) will allow students to transfer and use credits even from foreign universities.
- Strong focus on international collaboration, including:
 - ❖ Research partnerships
 - ❖ Faculty exchange
 - ❖ Student exchange programs
- NEP 2020 is not just an education reform—it is a vision to transform India into a global knowledge hub, where students learn, innovate, and succeed without boundaries.

❖ Conclusion: NEP 2020 (Higher Education Reforms)

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a modern and progressive approach to transforming India's higher education system in response to global and technological changes.

➤ Key Points:

- It introduces a flexible curriculum, allowing students to choose subjects according to their interests and career goals.
- The Academic Credit Bank (ABC) ensures smooth credit transfer, multiple entry-exit options, and continuous learning.
- Emphasis on vocational education helps develop practical skills and improves employability among students.
- Focus on research and innovation strengthens knowledge creation and encourages collaboration.
- Strong quality assurance mechanisms ensure better standards in higher education institutions.
- Through internationalization, it promotes global collaboration, foreign university participation, and recognition of international credits.
- Thus, NEP 2020 successfully connects all its objectives to build a flexible, skill-based, innovative, and globally competitive education system, preparing students for the challenges of the modern world

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