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FOREWORD

It is with immense pride and a deep sense of purpose that I present the inaugural issue of the Shibli National Academic Journal (SNAJ) to the global community of scholars, researchers, and students. Named in reverence to the towering legacy of Allama Shibli Nomani — a scholar whose intellectual contributions transcended boundaries of language, discipline, and geography — this journal aspires to carry forward that same spirit of rigorous, cross-cultural inquiry.



SNAJ was conceived from a simple but pressing conviction: that meaningful scholarship should not be confined by the language in which it is written, nor by the discipline from which it emerges. India's intellectual tradition has long thrived at the confluence of languages — English, Hindi, and Urdu among them — and it is this confluence that our journal seeks to honour. By welcoming original research across the humanities, social sciences, education, and emerging interdisciplinary, multilingual fields, we hope to build a genuinely inclusive platform for academic dialogue.

As Chief Editor, I have had the privilege of witnessing the dedication of our editorial board, reviewers, and contributors, whose collective commitment has shaped this first issue. Every article herein has passed through a rigorous double-blind peer review/ indexed process, and each is assigned a Crossref indexing, registered DOI, reflecting our unwavering commitment to academic integrity, originality, and permanence in the global research ecosystem.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed reviewers, editorial board members, and the scholars who entrusted us with their research. It is through their collective effort that this journal has moved from vision to reality. I also invite researchers, academicians, and students from across disciplines and linguistic traditions to consider SNAJ as a home for their scholarship in the issues to come.

It is my sincere hope that this journal will serve not merely as a repository of research, but as a living, evolving conversation — one that bridges languages, disciplines, and generations of scholars in pursuit of knowledge.

With warm regards,

Dr. Mohammad Zahid

Chief Editor
Shibli National Academic Journal (SNAJ)

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's educational landscape by introducing a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming higher education into a more flexible, multidisciplinary, inclusive, and globally competitive system. The policy seeks to enhance educational quality through institutional restructuring, competency-based learning, digital integration, research promotion, and improved governance. This paper critically examines the transformative potential of NEP 2020 in the context of higher education by exploring its major reforms, expected outcomes, implementation challenges, and future implications. Adopting a qualitative conceptual research design, the study synthesizes evidence from policy documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and scholarly literature published after the release of NEP 2020. The findings indicate that the policy has the potential to improve access, equity, academic flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, and research productivity. At the same time, successful implementation depends on adequate financial investment, institutional preparedness, faculty development, digital infrastructure, governance reforms, and stakeholder collaboration. The paper argues that NEP 2020 should be viewed not merely as a policy document but as a long-term transformative framework requiring sustained commitment from governments, universities, educators, and society. Effective implementation can contribute significantly to building a knowledge-based economy and preparing graduates equipped with twenty-first-century competencies.

Keywords: *National Education Policy 2020, Higher Education, Multidisciplinary Education, Academic Bank of Credits, Institutional Reforms, Educational Transformation.*

1. Introduction : Education has long been recognized as the cornerstone of national development, social transformation, and economic progress. In an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy, higher education institutions play a pivotal role in producing skilled human resources, generating research and innovation, and fostering democratic values and sustainable development. India's higher education system, one of the largest in the world, has expanded considerably over the past few decades. Despite this growth, persistent concerns relating to quality, employability, research productivity, rigid curricula, fragmented governance, and unequal access have continued to challenge the effectiveness of the system.

Recognizing these structural and functional limitations, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 after more than three decades of educational policy continuity. The policy presents a comprehensive vision for transforming the education system by promoting flexibility, multidisciplinary education, learner-centered pedagogy, digital innovation, research excellence, institutional autonomy, and inclusive educational opportunities. Unlike previous reforms that addressed isolated issues, NEP 2020 proposes an integrated framework connecting school education, higher education, vocational education, technology integration, teacher preparation, governance reforms, and lifelong learning.

One of the most significant features of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on multidisciplinary universities and holistic education. The policy encourages students to pursue diverse academic pathways through flexible curriculum structures, multiple entry and exit options, and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). These reforms are expected to reduce student dropout rates while allowing learners to customize their educational journeys according to their interests and career aspirations. Furthermore, the policy places considerable emphasis on research and innovation through the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF). It envisions research-intensive universities capable of addressing national priorities while contributing to global knowledge production. Simultaneously, digital learning has emerged as an essential component of higher education, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. NEP 2020 advocates the integration of educational technology to enhance accessibility, improve teaching-learning processes, and support blended learning models.

The policy also recognizes equity and inclusion as central objectives. It recommends targeted interventions for socio-economically disadvantaged groups, gender inclusion, regional

balance, and support for learners with disabilities. Through these measures, NEP 2020 aims to create an equitable education system capable of serving India's diverse population.

However, translating policy aspirations into institutional reality presents significant challenges. Limited financial resources, inadequate digital infrastructure, shortage of trained faculty, uneven institutional capacities, resistance to organizational change, and coordination among multiple regulatory bodies remain important concerns. The diversity of Indian higher education institutions further complicates uniform implementation across states and regions.

Given these opportunities and challenges, a critical academic examination of NEP 2020 becomes essential. While several studies have discussed specific aspects of the policy, there remains a need for a comprehensive analysis integrating policy objectives, implementation strategies, institutional challenges, and expected outcomes within a single framework.

Accordingly, this paper aims to critically examine the transformative role of NEP 2020 in higher education by addressing the following **objectives**:

- To examine the major reforms proposed under NEP 2020 for higher education.
- To analyze the opportunities created by the policy for improving quality, access, equity, and research.
- To identify the major challenges associated with policy implementation.
- To discuss the future implications of NEP 2020 for Indian higher education institutions.

The subsequent sections review existing literature, explain the methodological approach, present major findings, discuss policy implications, and conclude with recommendations for strengthening the implementation of NEP 2020.

2. Review of Related Literature : The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its transformative vision for Indian education. Researchers have examined its implications for curriculum reform, institutional governance, digital transformation, teacher education, research promotion, employability, and internationalization. Existing literature generally acknowledges that NEP 2020 represents one of the most comprehensive educational reforms undertaken in India since 1986. However, scholars also emphasize that successful implementation depends on sustained financial support, institutional readiness, faculty development, and effective governance.

One of the central themes emerging from the literature is multidisciplinary and holistic education. Kumar and Sharma (2021) argue that NEP 2020 departs from traditional discipline-specific education by encouraging students to combine subjects from diverse academic fields. This flexibility is expected to enhance creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and innovation among learners. Similarly, Singh (2022) contends that multidisciplinary education prepares graduates for complex professional environments where knowledge integration across disciplines has become increasingly important.

Another significant area of scholarly discussion concerns curriculum flexibility and student mobility. The introduction of multiple entry and exit options, along with the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), has been widely appreciated as a student-centric reform. According to Gupta (2021), these provisions reduce academic rigidity and provide learners with opportunities to continue education after temporary interruptions caused by financial, personal, or professional circumstances. Such flexibility is expected to improve student retention and lifelong learning opportunities.

The literature also highlights the importance of research and innovation under NEP 2020. The proposal to establish the National Research Foundation (NRF) has been viewed as a strategic initiative to strengthen India's research ecosystem. Agarwal (2021) notes that Indian universities have historically faced challenges related to inadequate research funding, fragmented institutional support, and limited interdisciplinary collaboration. The NRF is expected to provide competitive funding, promote collaborative research, and improve India's global research competitiveness. However, several scholars caution that research excellence cannot be achieved without sustained investment in laboratories, faculty recruitment, doctoral education, and international partnerships. Digital transformation has emerged as another dominant theme in recent studies. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online teaching and digital learning platforms, exposing both opportunities and inequalities within the education system. Mishra and Prasad (2022) argue that NEP 2020 appropriately recognizes educational technology as an essential component of modern higher education. The policy encourages blended learning, digital content development, virtual laboratories, and open educational resources. Nevertheless, researchers consistently identify the digital divide as a major obstacle, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions where internet connectivity and technological infrastructure remain inadequate.

Scholars have also extensively discussed teacher education and faculty development. According to Batra (2021), the success of NEP 2020 largely depends upon teachers' professional competencies, pedagogical innovation, technological proficiency, and research engagement. Continuous professional development programmes are therefore considered essential for enabling faculty members to implement competency-based learning, outcome-oriented curriculum, and technology-enabled instruction. Without adequate faculty preparation, policy reforms may remain limited to administrative documentation rather than classroom practice.

The issue of institutional governance and autonomy has received significant academic attention. NEP 2020 proposes restructuring higher education institutions into multidisciplinary universities while reducing excessive regulatory fragmentation. Jha (2022) argues that greater institutional autonomy can improve academic decision-making, innovation, accountability, and quality assurance. However, governance reforms require transparent leadership, administrative capacity, and effective coordination among central and state governments.

Equity and inclusion constitute another major area of scholarly inquiry. Researchers acknowledge that NEP 2020 emphasizes universal access by addressing educational disparities related to gender, socioeconomic background, geographical location, disability, and marginalized communities. Das and Roy (2023) observe that the policy introduces several mechanisms aimed at expanding higher education participation among underrepresented groups. Despite these initiatives, they argue that equitable implementation requires substantial public investment in scholarships, infrastructure development, student support services, and digital accessibility. Several comparative studies have examined NEP 2020 within the broader context of global higher education reforms. International trends increasingly emphasize lifelong learning, competency development, employability, innovation, international collaboration, and sustainable development. In this regard, researchers suggest that NEP 2020 aligns Indian higher education with emerging global educational priorities while preserving national values and cultural diversity.

Although existing literature generally supports the objectives of NEP 2020, scholars identify multiple implementation challenges. Financial constraints remain one of the most frequently cited concerns. India has historically invested less than the recommended proportion of GDP in education, raising questions regarding the feasibility of large-scale reforms. Infrastructure deficiencies, faculty shortages, uneven institutional capacities, bureaucratic delays, and resistance to organizational change are also recognized as potential barriers to successful implementation.

A critical review of available literature reveals that most studies have focused on individual components of NEP 2020, such as digital education, multidisciplinary learning, teacher education, or governance reforms. Relatively fewer studies provide an integrated analysis examining the interrelationship among these reforms and their collective impact on higher education transformation. This conceptual gap justifies the present study, which seeks to synthesize existing evidence and provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and future directions associated with NEP 2020.

3. Methodology : The present study adopts a qualitative conceptual research design to critically examine the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for higher education in India. Since the objective of the study is to analyze policy provisions, identify emerging themes, and synthesize existing scholarly evidence rather than collect primary data, a qualitative document analysis approach was considered appropriate.

The study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from multiple credible sources. These include the official document of the National Education Policy 2020 issued by the Government of India, peer-reviewed research articles, reports published by the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Ministry of Education, UNESCO reports, and other scholarly publications related to educational reforms and higher education.

Relevant literature published between 2020 and 2025 was identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, ERIC, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories. Studies were selected based on their relevance to higher education reforms, multidisciplinary education, digital learning, governance, research, quality assurance, equity, and implementation challenges under NEP 2020.

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic content analysis. During analysis, recurring concepts and policy dimensions were identified and categorized into major themes. These themes included curriculum flexibility, multidisciplinary education, research and innovation, institutional governance, digital transformation, inclusion and equity, faculty development, employability, and implementation challenges. The synthesized findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and limitations associated with the policy. As this is a conceptual study based entirely on publicly available literature and policy documents, no human participants were involved, and therefore ethical approval was not required.

4. Results and Findings : The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature reveals several important findings regarding the transformative potential of NEP 2020 in higher education.

4.1 Promotion of Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education

The reviewed studies consistently indicate that NEP 2020 promotes a shift from rigid disciplinary boundaries toward multidisciplinary learning. Universities are encouraged to offer flexible curricula that allow students to integrate knowledge from science, social sciences, humanities, arts, vocational education, and professional disciplines. Such flexibility is expected to strengthen critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities among graduates.

4.2 Increased Academic Flexibility

The introduction of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and the multiple entry and exit system represents one of the most significant reforms identified in the literature. These initiatives provide learners with greater academic mobility and reduce educational discontinuity caused by personal or financial circumstances. The reviewed studies suggest that flexible learning pathways can improve student retention and lifelong learning opportunities.

4.3 Strengthening Research and Innovation

Another major finding concerns the policy's emphasis on research. The proposed National Research Foundation (NRF) is expected to encourage interdisciplinary research, improve funding opportunities, strengthen university-industry collaboration, and enhance India's contribution to global knowledge production. Researchers believe that the policy has the potential to create a stronger research culture within higher education institutions.

4.4 Integration of Digital Technology

The literature strongly supports the policy's emphasis on digital transformation. Online learning platforms, virtual laboratories, digital repositories, blended learning, artificial intelligence, and educational technology are increasingly viewed as essential components of modern higher education. However, digital inequality remains a major concern, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions.

4.5 Institutional Governance and Quality Assurance

NEP 2020 proposes significant reforms in governance by promoting institutional autonomy, academic accountability, and transparent regulatory mechanisms. The creation of

multidisciplinary universities and streamlined regulatory structures is expected to improve institutional efficiency and educational quality. Nevertheless, effective governance requires capable leadership and administrative reforms at both institutional and governmental levels.

4.6 Equity and Inclusive Education

The analysis indicates that NEP 2020 places considerable emphasis on equitable access to higher education. The policy addresses barriers faced by women, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, rural populations, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities. Targeted scholarships, student support services, and digital accessibility are considered essential for achieving inclusive education.

4.7 Faculty Development

Faculty competence emerged as one of the most important determinants of successful policy implementation. Continuous professional development, digital literacy, research competence, innovative pedagogy, and interdisciplinary collaboration are necessary for translating policy objectives into classroom practice.

4.8 Implementation Challenges

Despite its transformative vision, the literature identifies several implementation challenges:

- Insufficient financial allocation for education.
- Inadequate digital infrastructure.
- Faculty shortages in many institutions.
- Resistance to organizational change.
- Administrative and regulatory complexities.
- Unequal institutional capacities across states.
- Limited awareness among stakeholders regarding policy provisions.

These challenges indicate that policy implementation requires sustained institutional commitment and collaborative governance

5. Discussion : The findings demonstrate that NEP 2020 represents one of the most ambitious educational reform initiatives undertaken in independent India. Unlike previous policies that primarily focused on expansion, NEP 2020 simultaneously addresses educational quality, institutional restructuring, research excellence, employability, technology integration, and social inclusion.

The policy reflects contemporary global trends emphasizing learner-centered education, competency-based curriculum, interdisciplinary knowledge, innovation, and lifelong learning. By promoting multidisciplinary universities and flexible academic pathways, NEP 2020 aligns Indian higher education with internationally recognized educational practices while preserving national priorities and cultural diversity.

One of the most significant strengths of the policy lies in its holistic vision of student development. Rather than emphasizing examination performance alone, NEP 2020 recognizes cognitive, emotional, ethical, professional, and social dimensions of learning. Such an approach has the potential to improve graduate employability and prepare students for rapidly changing labour markets.

However, the success of these reforms depends largely upon implementation capacity. Educational policies often fail because institutional preparedness remains inadequate. Universities require substantial investment in physical infrastructure, digital resources, faculty recruitment, research facilities, governance reforms, and quality assurance mechanisms. Without sufficient financial support, ambitious policy objectives may remain largely aspirational.

The findings also highlight the importance of faculty development. Teachers constitute the primary agents responsible for translating policy into educational practice. Consequently, continuous professional development programmes focusing on digital pedagogy, interdisciplinary teaching, assessment reform, and research capacity building should receive greater institutional priority. Digital transformation represents both an opportunity and a challenge. Although educational technology can significantly improve accessibility and flexibility, unequal access to internet connectivity, devices, and digital skills continues to widen educational inequalities. Therefore, technology integration should be accompanied by inclusive infrastructure development and capacity-building initiatives.

Finally, collaborative governance emerges as a critical factor for successful implementation. Effective coordination among central and state governments, regulatory agencies, universities,

faculty members, students, industry, and civil society organizations will determine the long-term success of NEP 2020.

6. Conclusion : The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark reform in the history of Indian education. It envisions a learner-centered, multidisciplinary, flexible, inclusive, and research-oriented higher education system that is capable of responding to the changing demands of the twenty-first century. The policy seeks to bridge the gap between knowledge and skills while promoting innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.

The findings of this conceptual study indicate that NEP 2020 has the potential to significantly improve the quality of higher education through curriculum flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, digital integration, institutional autonomy, enhanced research opportunities, and equitable access. Initiatives such as the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), multiple entry and exit options, the National Research Foundation (NRF), and technology-enabled learning can strengthen student mobility, academic excellence, and global competitiveness.

Despite these promising reforms, the study also highlights several implementation challenges. Inadequate financial resources, digital inequality, faculty shortages, governance complexities, and variations in institutional capacity may hinder the successful realization of the policy's objectives. Therefore, implementation should be viewed as a continuous and collaborative process rather than a one-time administrative reform. The study emphasizes that the effectiveness of NEP 2020 depends upon the active participation of governments, universities, teachers, students, regulatory bodies, industry, and society. Capacity building, professional development of teachers, infrastructure enhancement, and evidence-based policy monitoring will be essential for achieving sustainable educational transformation.

Overall, NEP 2020 provides a comprehensive roadmap for reimagining higher education in India. If implemented with adequate financial support, institutional commitment, and stakeholder collaboration, the policy has the potential to create an innovative, inclusive, globally competitive, and socially responsive higher education system that contributes to national development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Implications of the Study :

The findings of this study have several practical implications:

- Universities should strengthen interdisciplinary teaching-learning practices and redesign curricula in accordance with NEP 2020.
- Continuous faculty development programmes should be organized to enhance digital competence, innovative pedagogy, and research capabilities.
- Policymakers should increase public investment in higher education to facilitate effective implementation of reforms.
- Higher education institutions should improve digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all learners.
- Strong collaboration among universities, industry, research organizations, and government agencies should be promoted to foster innovation and employability.
- Future empirical studies should examine the long-term impact of NEP 2020 on learning outcomes, institutional performance, and graduate employability.

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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