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## From Policy to Practice: A Multidimensional Analysis of Implementation Challenges in India's National Education Policy 2020

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**Abstract:** The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to transform Indian higher education through multidisciplinary learning, digital integration and greater institutional autonomy. However, a gap remains between policy objectives and their implementation. This study examines the policy–practice divide using a conceptual and theory-based approach supported by a systematic review of secondary literature. It identifies key implementation challenges across institutional, human, technological and socio-economic dimensions. The findings indicate that inadequate institutional capacity, limited faculty preparedness, digital disparities, governance issues and socio-economic inequalities hinder effective implementation. The study proposes an integrated framework to explain these challenges and offers insights for policymakers and educational institutions to improve policy execution and guide future research.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), institutional capacity, digital education, faculty preparedness, socio-economic inequality, policy implementation

### 1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major reform initiative aimed at transforming Indian higher education through multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, digital integration and institutional autonomy. The policy seeks to align higher education with global standards while promoting holistic development, skill orientation and technology-enabled learning. Key reforms such as the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), flexible degree structures and digital learning platforms are designed to enhance interdisciplinary education, employability and lifelong learning. Despite its ambitious vision, the implementation of NEP 2020 faces significant challenges, resulting in a policy–practice divide between intended objectives and actual execution. Factors such as institutional capacity constraints, limited faculty preparedness, technological barriers, governance issues and socio-economic disparities affect implementation outcomes across institutions. Therefore, understanding these multidimensional challenges is essential for assessing the effectiveness of NEP 2020. This study examines the policy–practice divide and proposes an integrated framework to explain how institutional, human, technological and socio-economic factors collectively influence policy implementation in Indian higher education.

#### 1.1. Importance of Nep 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark reform aimed at transforming Indian higher education through flexibility, multidisciplinary learning and skill-based education. It promotes a holistic and learner-centric approach by encouraging interdisciplinary studies and breaking traditional academic boundaries. The policy also emphasises digital learning, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and institutional autonomy to enhance innovation and accessibility. By aligning Indian higher education with global standards while addressing national needs, NEP 2020 seeks to improve the quality, relevance and global competitiveness of graduates.

#### 1.2. Need For Educational Reforms in India

The introduction of NEP 2020 was driven by persistent challenges in Indian higher education, including out-dated curricula, limited industry relevance and excessive emphasis on theoretical learning. Significant disparities in quality, infrastructure, faculty availability and digital access

continue to affect educational outcomes across institutions. Additionally, rapid technological advancements and the evolving knowledge economy require graduates to possess critical thinking, adaptability and digital skills. Therefore, systemic reforms in governance, pedagogy and curriculum design were necessary to modernise higher education and enhance its relevance in a globally competitive environment.

### **1.3. Problem Statement: Policy–Practice Divide**

Despite its transformative vision, NEP 2020 faces significant challenges in translating policy objectives into effective institutional practice, resulting in a policy–practice divide. Many higher education institutions lack adequate infrastructure, financial resources and administrative capacity to implement key reforms. Faculty preparedness and the adoption of innovative teaching approaches remain major concerns. Additionally, technological inequalities and socio-economic disparities limit equitable access to educational opportunities, particularly in rural and under-resourced regions. Governance and coordination challenges further contribute to variations in implementation across institutions, hindering the effective realisation of NEP 2020 goals.

### **1.4. Research Objective**

To conceptually examine the implementation challenges of NEP 2020 and propose a multidimensional framework encompassing institutional, human, technological and socio-economic factors influencing the policy–practice divide in Indian higher education.

## **2. Review Of Literature**

### **2.1. NEP 2020 Vision & Reforms**

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative shift in Indian higher education, emphasizing multidisciplinary learning, flexibility and global competitiveness. NEP 2020 aimed to modernize the system by integrating diverse disciplines and fostering holistic education (Sethy & Mahapatro, 2025). Multidisciplinary education has been found to enhance innovation and adaptability, which are essential in a knowledge-driven economy. A major structural reform is the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), which allows flexibility in learning pathways and supports lifelong education. Additionally, NEP 2020 strongly emphasized digital learning ecosystems, including MOOCs, SWAYAM and ICT-enabled platforms, to expand access and improve quality (Acharya, 2025).

### **2.2. Policy Implementation Theory**

Policy implementation is a complex process influenced by institutional capacity and stakeholder engagement. The top-down approach focuses on centralized decision-making, whereas the bottom-up approach emphasizes local-level adaptation and participation (Sabatier, 2014).

Recent studies on NEP 2020 also highlighted that implementation effectiveness varies significantly across institutions, reinforcing the relevance of policy–practice gap theory (Goswami & Sau, 2025).

### **2.3. Challenges In Indian Higher Education**

Despite its progressive vision, NEP 2020 faces multiple implementation challenges. Infrastructure constraints, including inadequate physical and digital facilities, remained a major barrier to reform adoption (Tilak, 2015).

Recent empirical studies confirmed that NEP implementation is hindered by financial constraints, lack of infrastructure and socio-economic inequalities, reinforcing the existence of a policy–practice divide (Mangat, 2024).

### **2.4 Research Gap**

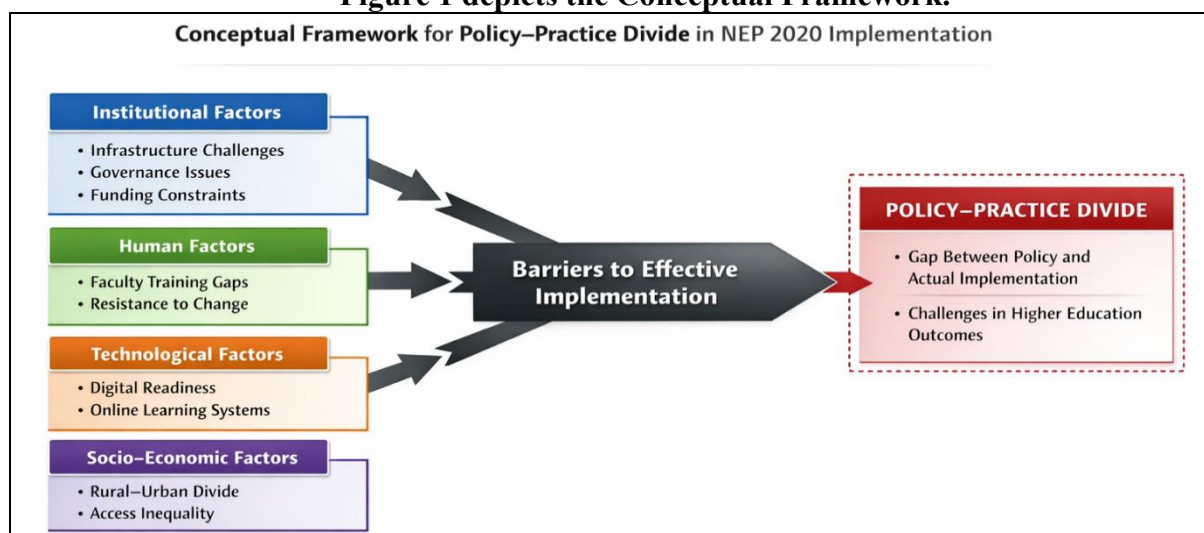
Despite the growing literature on NEP 2020, most studies are descriptive and focus on policy features rather than implementation challenges. Existing research often examines factors such as infrastructure, faculty readiness and digital access separately, lacking an integrated perspective.

Moreover, limited attention has been given to understanding the policy–practice divide and the interaction of institutional, human, technological and socio-economic factors. Consequently, there is a need for a multidimensional conceptual framework to explain the complex and interconnected challenges affecting the effective implementation of NEP 2020 in Indian higher education.

### 3. Conceptual Framework: Bridging The Policy–Practice Divide

The proposed framework is grounded in Policy Implementation Theory, Institutional Theory, Human Capital Theory and Digital Divide Theory. It explains that the successful implementation of NEP 2020 depends on the interaction of institutional, human, technological and socio-economic factors. The core proposition is that the policy–practice divide arises from interconnected barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited faculty preparedness, technological constraints, governance challenges and socio-economic inequalities. These factors collectively influence the translation of policy objectives into institutional practice. Consequently, the effectiveness of NEP 2020 implementation is determined not by policy design alone but by the ability of institutions to address these multidimensional challenges and bridge the gap between policy intent and actual execution.

**Figure 1 depicts the Conceptual Framework.**



#### 3.1. Institutional Factors - Structural Readiness

Institutional capacity forms the foundation of policy execution.

- **Infrastructure Challenges:** Inadequate classrooms, laboratories, and digital facilities restrict the adoption of multidisciplinary and technology-enabled programs.
- **Governance Issues:** Weak coordination among universities, colleges, and regulatory bodies delays policy implementation and decision-making.
- **Funding Constraints:** Limited financial resources hinder infrastructure development, faculty recruitment, and capacity-building initiatives.

#### 3.2. Human Factors - Capacity And Mindset

Human capital determines how effectively reforms are internalized.

- **Faculty Training Gaps:** Limited training in interdisciplinary and technology-enabled pedagogy reduces the effectiveness of policy implementation and innovative teaching practices.
- **Resistance to Change:** Preference for traditional teaching approaches slows adoption of new reforms. For example, professors continuing lecture-based teaching instead of interactive learning.

### 3.3. Technological Factors - Digital Enablement

Technology acts as a key enabler of NEP reforms.

- **Digital Readiness:** Lack of reliable internet and ICT infrastructure hampers digital learning initiatives. For example, students are unable to access online lectures due to poor internet connectivity.
- **Online Learning Systems:** Inefficient or underutilized platforms reduce engagement and accessibility. For example, students tend to underutilize online courses because the systems are complex or unfamiliar.

### 3.4. Socio-Economic Factors - Equity And Access

Broader societal conditions significantly influence policy outcomes.

- **Rural–Urban Divide:** Disparities in institutional capacity create uneven implementation. For example, a city college successfully implements NEP reforms, while a rural college struggles.
- **Access Inequality:** Socio-economic barriers limit students' ability to benefit from reforms. For example, students are unable to benefit from digital learning due to a lack of devices.

## 4. Propositions

Grounded in the conceptual framework of the National Education Policy 2020, the following propositions explain the key drivers of the policy–practice divide in Indian higher education:

**P1:** Institutional capacity is negatively associated with the policy–practice divide; lower infrastructure adequacy significantly increases implementation gaps.

**P2:** Faculty preparedness is negatively associated with the policy–practice divide; lower pedagogical readiness and higher resistance to change increase implementation gaps.

**P3:** Digital readiness is negatively associated with the policy–practice divide; limited access to digital infrastructure increases disparities in implementation outcomes.

**P4:** Financial resource availability is negatively associated with the policy–practice divide; resource constraints hinder effective implementation.

**P5:** Governance effectiveness is negatively associated with the policy–practice divide; weaker coordination increases implementation inefficiencies.

**P6:** Socio-economic inequality is positively associated with the policy–practice divide; higher inequality leads to uneven implementation outcomes.

## 5. Discussion

The above propositions collectively highlight that the effectiveness of NEP 2020 implementation is shaped by a complex interplay of systemic factors, rather than isolated challenges.

**P1: Institutional Constraints:** Inadequate infrastructure, laboratories and digital facilities limit the effective implementation of multidisciplinary and technology-enabled education.

**P2: Human Capacity Challenges:** Insufficient faculty training, limited interdisciplinary skills and resistance to change hinder the adoption of innovative teaching practices.

**P3: Technological Barriers:** Unequal access to digital infrastructure and ICT resources creates disparities in the implementation of digital learning initiatives.

**P4: Financial Limitations:** Budget constraints restrict investments in infrastructure, faculty development and technology, reducing the effectiveness and sustainability of reforms.

**P5: Governance Inefficiencies:** Weak coordination, fragmented regulatory systems and inconsistent policy adoption slow down implementation and reduce accountability.

**P6: Socio-Economic Disparities:** Students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers to access, resulting in unequal benefits from NEP 2020 reforms.

## 6. Policy Implications

The policy implications emerging from this study emphasize the need for systemic, multi-level and context-sensitive interventions to bridge the policy–practice divide in NEP 2020 implementation.

### 6.1. Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Policymakers must prioritize infrastructure development and institutional readiness, particularly in public and rural institutions. Targeted investments in classrooms, laboratories and digital facilities are essential to enable multidisciplinary and technology-driven education.

### 6.2. Faculty Development And Change Management

A structured and continuous faculty training ecosystem is critical. National and institutional-level programs should focus on: Multidisciplinary teaching skills, Digital pedagogy, Outcome-based education etc.

### 6.3. Enhancing Digital Ecosystems

To support NEP’s digital vision, there is a need to: Expand high-speed internet access across regions, Strengthen platforms such as SWAYAM and LMS systems, Promote digital literacy among students and faculty

### 6.4. Ensuring Sustainable Financial Support

Effective implementation requires adequate and sustained funding. Policy measures should include: Increased public investment in higher education, Performance-based funding models, Incentives for innovation and interdisciplinary programs

### 6.5. Governance Reforms And Institutional Autonomy

Clear, streamlined and coordinated governance structures are necessary. This includes: Reducing regulatory fragmentation, Enhancing institutional autonomy with accountability, Strengthening coordination between central, state and institutional bodies

### 6.6. Promoting Equity And Inclusion

To ensure inclusive implementation, policies must address socio-economic disparities by: Providing financial aid and scholarships, supporting rural and marginalized institutions, expanding access to digital tools and learning resources. The success of NEP 2020 depends not only on visionary policy design but on the creation of an enabling ecosystem that integrates infrastructure, capacity, governance and equity.

### 6.7 Theoretical And Practical Contributions

- **Theoretical Contribution:** This study contributes to Policy Implementation Theory by proposing an integrated framework to explain the policy–practice divide in NEP 2020 implementation. The framework combines institutional, human, technological, and socio-economic factors within a unified model. It further extends Institutional Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Digital Divide Theory by highlighting the roles of governance, faculty preparedness, and technological inequalities in shaping implementation outcomes. By integrating these perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected challenges influencing higher education policy implementation in developing countries.
- **Practical Contribution:** This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, institutional leaders and educators by identifying key challenges in the implementation of NEP 2020. The proposed multidimensional framework serves as a tool to assess barriers related to institutional capacity, faculty readiness, digital infrastructure, governance and socio-economic access. The findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions, including infrastructure development, faculty training, digital expansion, governance reforms and inclusive policies. By linking theory with practice, the study offers a roadmap for effective policy implementation and highlights that achieving NEP 2020 objectives requires coordinated and systemic efforts rather than isolated initiatives.

## 7. Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 presents a transformative vision for Indian higher education through flexibility, multidisciplinary learning and digital integration. However, its successful implementation is challenged by a significant policy–practice divide arising from institutional, human, technological, governance, financial and socio-economic constraints. This study highlights that these challenges are interconnected and require a comprehensive rather than isolated approach. By providing a multidimensional conceptual framework, the study offers a deeper understanding of NEP 2020 implementation challenges and serves as a foundation for future research and policy interventions. Achieving the objectives of NEP 2020 will require coordinated, inclusive and context-sensitive efforts that effectively bridge the gap between policy aspirations and institutional realities.

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## About SLU College

Shree Lalshankar Umiyashankar Arts and Harivadan & Padmaben Thakore Commerce College for Women, which was established in 1920 as an endeavour of Gujarat Stree Kelvani Mandal, has the proud privilege of being the first women's college in Ahmedabad. The college is recognised under Section 2 (f) and 12 (b) of UGC Act 17th June, 1972. The college runs various programmes in affiliation with Gujarat University such as - B.A., B.Com., and M.Com. The BS-BBA programme was added from the academic year 2025-2026. The college also runs several add-on programmes like Fashion Design and Computer Courses at the ICTC centre located at the SLU Campus.

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