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INDEX

Sr. No.	Paper No.	Paper Title	Authors Name	Page No.
1	W01	AI in Teaching, Learning and Research	Dr. Alpesh R. Prajapati	01-05
2	W02 & W03	From Policy to Practice: A Multidimensional Analysis of Implementation Challenges in India's National Education Policy 2020	Dr. Deepa C. Chandwani Dr. Pragnesh B. Dalwadi	06-11
3	W04	Role of NEP-2020 in Transforming Higher Education in India	Dr. Hardik Mehta	12-16
4	W06	NEP 2020: A Transformative Stage Toward Equity and Inclusion in Education	Dr. Manish M. Chudasama	17-22
5	W07 & W16	NEP 2020 and Its Implementation: Examining Challenges in the Indian Education Sector	Dr. Gargi P Patel Dr. Nirali Ketan Shah	23-28
6	W09	National Education Policy to Transform the Education System of 21st Century: Prospects and its Implementation	Dr. Shilpa Jayantilal Patel	29-34
7	W11	Assessing NEP-2020 Implementation in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Faculty and Student Perspectives	Dr. Vrundani K. Patel	35-43
8	W14	Reimagining Education: A Sociological Analysis of NEP 2020's Challenges and Future Outcomes	Mr. Jitendra Dhebariya	44-50
9	W20	Bridging The Digital Divide in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges of Technology Integration under National Education Policy 2020	Dr. Avani Lalitkumar Saraiya	51-58
10	W24	Digital Education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Higher Education	Dr. Jigarkumar Joshi	59-64
11	W25& W26	Digital Education and Technology Integration under NEP 2020	Dr. Ketan J Mehta Dr. Ravjibhai Kotval	65-69
12	W27	Teacher Capacity Building: Evaluating the Effectiveness of AI-Powered NotebookLM in Classroom Pedagogy	Dr. Krishna M. Lakhani	70-74
13	W28	Digital Education and Technology Integration in Higher Education: Students' Perspectives in the Context of NEP 2020	Dr. Rohan Shah	75-81
14	W29	Digital India and Educational Transformation: A Comprehensive Statistical Analysis using Multiple Regression Approach	Dr. Sanjay G Raval	82-87
15	W30& W31	Transforming India's Workforce: A Critical Study of Skill Development Initiatives under the NEP 2020	Dr. Vishal Gupta Dr. Ghanshyambhai M. Anjara	88-94

16	W32	Implementation of National Education Policy 2020 in Higher Education: Opportunities and Constraints	Mr. Bhaveshkumar R. Rathod	95-100
17	W35& P72	Digital Accounting Practices in MSMEs: An Empirical Study of Awareness and Usage Behaviour	Ms. Shivangi N. Patel Dr. Amina Nakhuda	101-104
18	W37	Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Higher Education: Revitalizing Cultural Roots and Enhancing Learning Outcomes	Dr. Ajitha Shambhu Nair	105-111
19	W40	Indian Knowledge System in New Education Policy	Dr. Rupalben Ashokkumar	112-115
20	W41& W42	Towards Holistic Learning: The Vision of NEP 2020 (An Empirical Analytical Study Based on Primary Data)	Dr. Shital Rathod Dr. Kandarp Chavda	116-120
21	W43	Integrating Ayurveda into Leadership: A Dosha-Centred Approach	Dr. Megha Bhatt	121-128
22	W44	Educating the Inner Self for a Young Nation: Leveraging the Bhagavad Gita and Indian Philosophy to Realize India's Demographic Dividend	Dr. Shweta Zala	129-135
23	W45 & P26	Physical Activity and Sports as Pedagogical Tools in School Education: A Critical Analysis of NEP 2020	Dr. Mukeshkumar B. Baraiya Dr. Yogendra J. Chauhan	136-141
24	W48	Comparative Evaluation of Traditional and Modern Teaching Approaches in Secondary Schools of Ahmedabad City	Dr. Navita Sharma	142-147
25	W49	Portuguese Colonial Legacy and Its Impact on Tourism Development in Diu	Mr. Hardik R. Rathod	148-152
26	W52	English as a Bridge to Higher Education: Women's Academic Inclusion in Post-NEP 2020 India — A Qualitative Secondary-Data Review	Dr. Payal Trivedi	153-156
27	W56& W57	Inclusivity under NEP 2020: A Critical Study of Adivasi (Bhil) Representation in Higher Education	Ms. Saba Syed Dr. Sagar Vyas	157-160
28	W58& W59 P71	Comparative Risk–Return Evaluation of Selected Investment Instruments in the Indian Financial Market	Dr. Khagesh Joshi Ms. Lekshmi Ezhava Dr. Vaibhav Gallani	161-169
29	W60 & 61	Performance Evaluation of Selected Public Sector Banks in India.	Ms. Heenaben Parmar Dr. Ronak Rana	170-177
30	W23	Technology-Driven Higher Education: Insights from Students and Educators	Dr. Janki Mahesh Kotecha	178-181
31	W33	Need And Issues of Digital Education	Mr. Hasmukh Ramanlal Panchal	182-188

W04: Role of NEP-2020 in Transforming Higher Education in India

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Abstract: The National Education Policy 2020 marks a significant milestone in the evolution of Indian higher education, aiming to align it with the demands of the twenty-first century. With over **1,100 universities and 43,000 colleges (AISHE 2021–22)**, India possesses one of the largest higher education systems globally; however, challenges such as a **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of about 28.4%**, low research output (around **4–5% of global publications**), and employability concerns persist. NEP-2020 proposes a flexible, multidisciplinary, and learner-centered framework that promotes critical thinking, innovation, and skill development while preserving national values and knowledge traditions. This study examines the structural and functional transformations introduced by NEP-2020, including multidisciplinary education, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), multiple entry and exit options, and the integration of vocational and skill-based learning. It also highlights the establishment of the National Research Foundation to strengthen research and innovation, alongside the expansion of digital education. The policy aims to increase the GER to **50% by 2035**, enhance accessibility, and ensure inclusivity for marginalized groups.

The paper also analyzes key implementation challenges such as financial constraints, infrastructural gaps, digital divide, and the need for teacher capacity building. It concludes that effective implementation and stakeholder collaboration are essential to realize NEP-2020's vision of transforming India into a globally competitive knowledge society.

Keywords: NEP-2020, Reforms, Education, Skills, Research, Digital, Inclusion.

Introduction

India's higher education system—one of the largest globally, with over 1,100 universities and more than 43,000 colleges (AISHE Report 2021–22)—has significantly expanded in access and enrolment. However, before the introduction of National Education Policy 2020, it remained constrained by rigid disciplinary boundaries, limited interdisciplinary exposure, and an overreliance on rote learning. Despite a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of around 28.4% (2021–22), challenges such as uneven quality, low research output (India contributes about 4–5% of global research publications), skill gaps, and socio-economic disparities persisted. In the context of globalization, rapid technological change, and a knowledge-driven economy, traditional teaching methods proved insufficient, necessitating reforms that promote critical thinking, creativity, digital integration, and lifelong learning. The National Education Policy 2020 introduces a comprehensive framework to address these issues by emphasizing multidisciplinary and holistic education, flexible curricula with multiple entry-exit options, and the integration of vocational and academic streams. It also prioritizes research and innovation through initiatives like the National Research Foundation and promotes digital learning ecosystems. Furthermore, the policy aims to increase the GER to **50% by 2035**, expand access, and incorporate Indian Knowledge Systems alongside global best practices.

Thus, NEP-2020 envisions transforming higher education into an inclusive, skill-oriented, and research-driven system. Its effective implementation can strengthen human capital, enhance

employability, and position India as a global knowledge hub while ensuring equitable and quality education for all.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the key features of National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) and its vision for higher education in India.
2. To analyze the structural reforms introduced by NEP-2020 in higher education, including multidisciplinary education, academic flexibility, and institutional restructuring.
3. To evaluate the impact of NEP-2020 on teaching-learning processes, curriculum design, and assessment methods in higher education institutions.
4. To explore the role of NEP-2020 in promoting research, innovation, and digital learning in Indian universities and colleges.
5. To assess the implications of NEP-2020 for faculty development and capacity building in higher education.
6. To study the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of NEP-2020 across diverse educational contexts in India.
7. To investigate how NEP-2020 aims to enhance access, equity, and inclusivity in higher education.
8. To analyze the policy's role in internationalization of higher education and improving global competitiveness of Indian institutions.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a **qualitative and descriptive research design** to examine the role of National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) in transforming higher education in India. The methodology is primarily based on **secondary data analysis**, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the policy framework and its implications.

1. Research Design

The study follows a **descriptive and analytical approach**, focusing on interpreting policy provisions, reforms, and their potential impact on higher education. It aims to critically analyze the structural and functional changes introduced by NEP-2020.

2. Sources of Data

The research is based on **secondary sources**, including:

- Official documents such as the NEP-2020 report published by the Government of India
- Reports and publications from organizations like UGC, AICTE, and Ministry of Education
- Peer-reviewed journals, books, and research articles related to higher education reforms
- Reputable online databases, academic websites, and policy briefs

3. Data Collection Method

Data has been collected through **document analysis**, involving a careful review of policy documents, scholarly literature, and institutional reports. Relevant information has been systematically selected and categorized according to the objectives of the study.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The collected data is analyzed using **thematic analysis**, where major themes such as multidisciplinary education, academic flexibility, digitalization, research promotion, and institutional restructuring are identified and interpreted. A **comparative perspective** is also used to evaluate changes before and after NEP-2020.

5. Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the **higher education sector in India** and focuses on the transformative aspects introduced by NEP-2020. It does not involve primary data collection such as surveys or interviews.

6. Limitations of the Study

- The study relies solely on secondary data, which may limit empirical validation
- As NEP-2020 is a relatively recent policy, its long-term impact cannot yet be fully assessed
- Variations in implementation across states and institutions may affect uniform conclusions

The National Education Policy 2020 places strong emphasis on multidisciplinary and holistic education, aiming to dismantle rigid boundaries between disciplines and promote intellectual flexibility. This approach resonates with Newman’s idea that education should cultivate a “habit of mind,” enabling lifelong critical thinking and ethical awareness. By introducing flexible curricula, multiple entry–exit options, and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), the policy fosters learner autonomy and continuous education. Research and innovation form another critical pillar of NEP-2020, with the establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to enhance funding and interdisciplinary inquiry. India currently contributes around 4–5% of global research output, which the policy seeks to expand through improved infrastructure and collaboration. Simultaneously, the integration of digital technology—accelerated after the COVID-19 pandemic—has transformed teaching and learning through online platforms and virtual classrooms. However, challenges such as the digital divide remain significant; as per NSSO data, only about 24% of Indian households have internet access, with lower penetration in rural areas. The policy also emphasizes inclusivity by targeting marginalized groups through financial aid, gender inclusion funds, and special education zones, while aiming to raise the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035. The analysis of data related to the National Education Policy 2020 reveals a clear shift from a traditional, rigid higher education system to a more flexible, learner-centered, and skill-oriented framework. Empirical indicators show that India has over 1,100 universities and 43,000+ colleges (AISHE 2021–22), making it one of the largest systems globally; however, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) stands at about 28.4%, which is significantly lower than many developed nations. NEP-2020 aims to increase this to 50% by 2035, indicating a strong policy push toward expanding access. The emphasis on multidisciplinary education and intellectual development reflects Newman’s assertion that *“a habit of mind is formed which lasts through life”* (77), supporting the policy’s focus on holistic learning rather than narrow specialization. Further data analysis highlights a critical gap between education and employability. Reports such as the India Skills Report (2022) suggest that

only around 46% of graduates are employable, demonstrating the limitations of theory-based education.

The data also underscores both opportunities and challenges in digital and inclusive education. While NEP-2020 promotes digital transformation, only about 24% of Indian households have internet access (NSSO), with rural areas facing greater disparities. This digital divide poses a significant barrier to equitable implementation. At the same time, the policy's focus on inclusivity—through gender inclusion funds, scholarships, and special education zones—supports its vision of equitable access. Dewey's insight that "*education is not preparation for life; education is life itself*" (239) resonates with the policy's emphasis on lifelong learning and flexible educational pathways. Overall, the data analysis demonstrates that NEP-2020 is a comprehensive and forward-looking reform; however, its success will depend on addressing structural inequalities, ensuring adequate funding, and strengthening institutional capacity for effective implementation. Furthermore, NEP-2020's commitment to equity and inclusion is a significant step toward democratizing education. In essence, NEP-2020 represents a paradigm shift in Indian higher education, balancing global competitiveness with local relevance. Its long-term impact will depend on how effectively its principles are translated into practice, ensuring that reforms lead to tangible improvements in quality, access, and innovation.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative vision for restructuring and revitalizing higher education in India. The findings of this study reveal that NEP-2020 promotes a learner-centered approach by encouraging critical thinking, creativity, and experiential learning, thereby addressing the long-standing dominance of rote-based education. The analysis further indicates that NEP-2020 has significant potential to improve the quality, accessibility, and relevance of higher education. Its emphasis on inclusivity, gender equity, and support for marginalized groups highlights education as a powerful instrument of social transformation and nation-building. In conclusion, NEP-2020 marks a paradigm shift in the Indian education system, redefining the purpose and scope of higher education in the twenty-first century. The study concludes that while the policy offers a robust and forward-looking framework, its success depends on effective and timely implementation through coordinated efforts among government bodies, educational institutions, and stakeholders. If these challenges are adequately addressed, NEP-2020 has the potential to transform India into a global knowledge hub and contribute significantly to sustainable development and socio-economic progress.

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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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