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W11: Assessing NEP-2020 Implementation in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Faculty and Student Perspectives

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Abstract: The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) represents a transformative shift in India's higher education system, emphasizing multidisciplinary learning, flexibility, skill development, and digital integration. The present study aims to assess the implementation of NEP-2020 in higher education institutions through a comparative analysis of faculty and student perceptions in Ahmedabad city. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based on primary data collected from 50 respondents, comprising 25 faculty members and 25 undergraduate students (2nd and 3rd year). Data was collected using structured questionnaires based on a five-point Likert scale and analysed using percentage techniques and comparative methods.

The findings reveal that faculty members demonstrate higher awareness and preparedness regarding NEP-2020, while students exhibit moderate awareness and limited understanding of key provisions. Both groups perceive the implementation as gradual and incomplete, indicating that institutions are still in a transitional phase. The study also identifies key challenges such as a lack of training among faculty, limited awareness among students, infrastructural constraints, and slow institutional adaptation. Despite these challenges, both faculty and students maintain a positive attitude towards the policy and acknowledge its potential to improve the quality of higher education. The study concludes that while NEP-2020 is widely accepted in principle, its practical implementation remains uneven. It highlights the need for increased awareness, capacity building, and institutional support to effectively translate policy objectives into practice.

Keywords

NEP-2020, Higher Education, Faculty Perception, Student Perception, Policy Implementation, Educational Reforms

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of NEP-2020

The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) marks a significant shift in the Indian education system, aiming to transform higher education through flexibility, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and digital integration. It emphasizes a holistic and learner-centric approach, replacing rigid disciplinary boundaries with a more adaptive and inclusive structure.

1.2 NEP-2020 and Higher Education Reforms

NEP-2020 introduces several reforms in higher education, including:

- Multidisciplinary and holistic education
- Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)
- Flexible learning pathways
- Emphasis on skill-based and experiential learning

These reforms aim to enhance the employability, innovation, and global competitiveness of Indian graduates.

1.3 Role of Stakeholders in Implementation

The success of NEP-2020 largely depends on its effective implementation at the institutional level. Faculty members play a crucial role in curriculum restructuring, pedagogy, and assessment, while students are the primary beneficiaries of these reforms. Their perception and readiness significantly influence the success of policy implementation.

1.4 Challenges in Implementation

Despite its visionary framework, NEP-2020 faces several challenges:

- Lack of awareness among stakeholders
- Inadequate infrastructure and digital resources
- Limited training and capacity building for faculty
- Slow pace of institutional adaptation

These challenges may create a gap between policy formulation and actual practice.

1.5 Need for the Study

Understanding the perception of both faculty and students is essential to evaluating the ground-level implementation of NEP-2020. Their insights can help identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on higher education institutions in Ahmedabad city and attempts to analyze and compare the perceptions of faculty and students regarding the implementation of NEP-2020.

2. Literature Review

Table 2.1: Review of Literature

Sr. No.	Author(s)	Title of the Paper	Type of Study	Central Theme
1	Kumar, A. (2021)	Implementation of NEP-2020 in Higher Education	Conceptual	Highlights opportunities and challenges in implementing NEP reforms
2	Sharma, R. & Gupta, P. (2022)	Teacher Readiness for NEP-2020	Analytical	Finds a lack of training and awareness among faculty
3	Singh, M. (2021)	NEP-2020 and Digital Transformation	Conceptual	Emphasizes the importance of digital infrastructure
4	Patel, S. (2022)	Student Perception on NEP-2020	Empirical	Students show moderate awareness but a positive attitude
5	Joshi, V. & Mehta, K. (2023)	Challenges in NEP Implementation	Analytical	Identifies administrative and infrastructural barriers

Summary of Literature

The review of literature indicates that while NEP-2020 is widely appreciated for its progressive vision, several studies highlight challenges in its implementation, particularly in terms of faculty

preparedness, infrastructure, and awareness. Most studies focus either on faculty or students separately, indicating a need for a comparative approach.

3. Research Gap

Most existing studies focus either on the conceptual analysis of NEP-2020 or on the perception of a single stakeholder group. There is limited research that provides a comparative analysis of both faculty and student perspectives, especially at the city level.

The present study attempts to bridge this gap by offering a dual-perspective analysis based on primary data from higher education institutions in Ahmedabad, thereby providing more grounded and practical insights into the implementation of NEP-2020.

4. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To assess the level of awareness and understanding of NEP-2020 among faculty and students.
- 2) To analyze the perception of faculty and students regarding the implementation of NEP-2020 in higher education institutions.
- 3) To identify key challenges faced in the implementation of NEP-2020.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Type of Study

The present study is empirical in nature, as it is based on primary data collected from faculty members and students. It aims to generate first-hand insights into their perceptions regarding the implementation of NEP-2020.

5.2 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design.

- The descriptive aspect helps in understanding the current level of awareness and perception among respondents.
- The analytical aspect focuses on comparing the responses of faculty and students to identify patterns, differences, and key challenges.

5.3 Data Source

The study is based on primary data, collected directly from respondents through structured questionnaires. This ensures authenticity and relevance of the data to the research objectives.

5.4 Sample Size

The total sample size of the study comprises 50 respondents, which includes:

- 25 Faculty Members
- 25 Undergraduate Students (2nd and 3rd Year)

5.5 Sampling Technique

The study uses a convenience sampling technique, where respondents were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. This method is suitable for exploratory and perception-based studies.

5.6 Data Collection Tool

Data was collected using structured questionnaires designed separately for faculty and students.

- I. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), which helps in measuring attitudes and perceptions quantitatively.
- II. A few open-ended questions were also included to capture deeper insights, opinions, and suggestions from respondents.

The questionnaires are provided in Annexure I and Annexure II.

5.7 Area of Study

The study is confined to higher education institutions located in Ahmedabad city, providing a localized understanding of NEP-2020 implementation.

5.8 Nature of Data

The data collected is quantitative in nature, supported by limited qualitative inputs from open-ended responses. This combination helps in both statistical analysis and interpretative understanding.

5.9 Data Analysis Tools

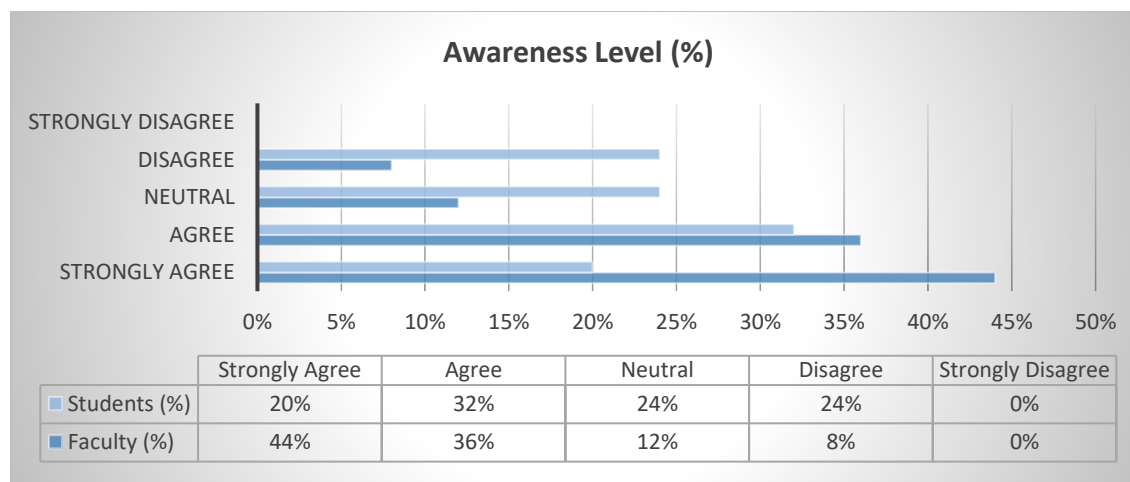
The collected data has been analyzed using:

- Percentage Analysis
- Comparative Analysis (Faculty vs Students)
- Tabular Representation
- Graphical Tools (Bar Charts and Pie Charts)

These tools help in presenting the data in a clear, concise, and interpretable manner.

6. Data Analysis & Interpretation

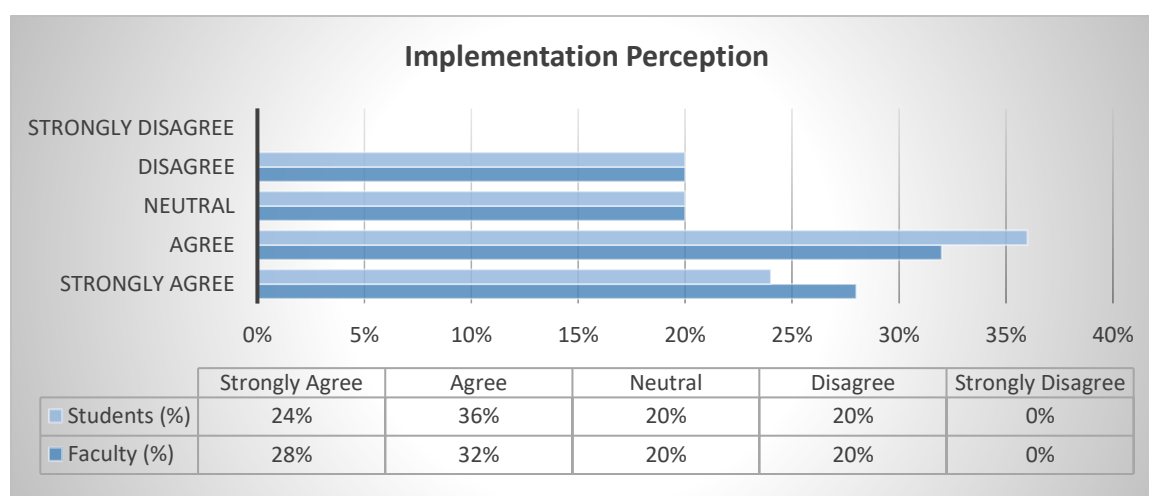
6.1 Awareness of NEP-2020



Interpretation:

The data clearly indicate that faculty members exhibit a higher level of awareness regarding NEP-2020 compared to students. A majority of faculty responses fall under “Agree” and “Strongly Agree,” whereas students show relatively higher neutrality and disagreement. This suggests a significant awareness gap among students.

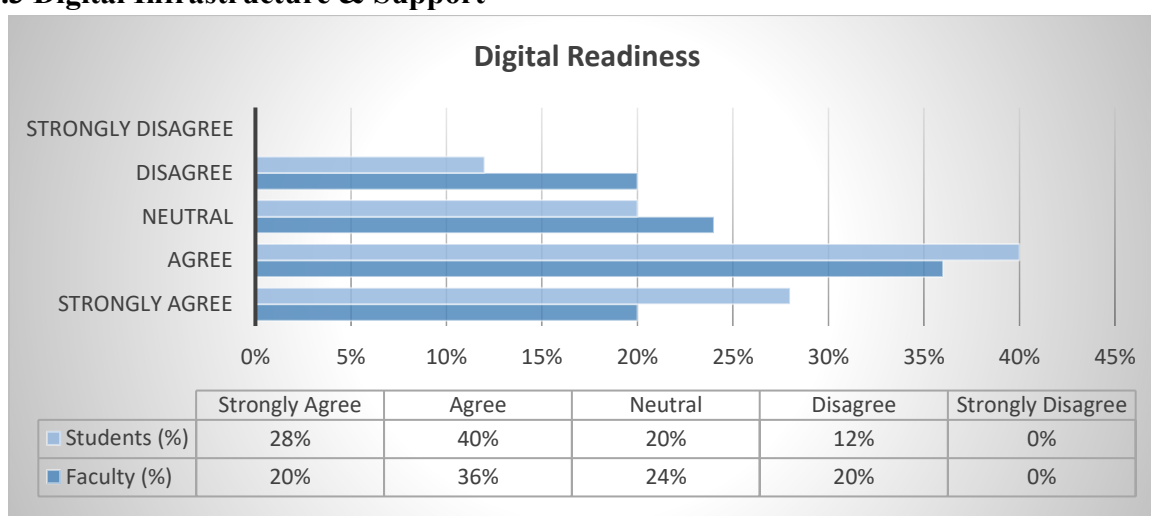
6.2 Implementation Status



Interpretation:

Both faculty and students perceive the implementation of NEP-2020 as moderate. The responses are distributed across agreement and neutrality, indicating that institutions are still in a transitional phase. There is no strong consensus on full implementation.

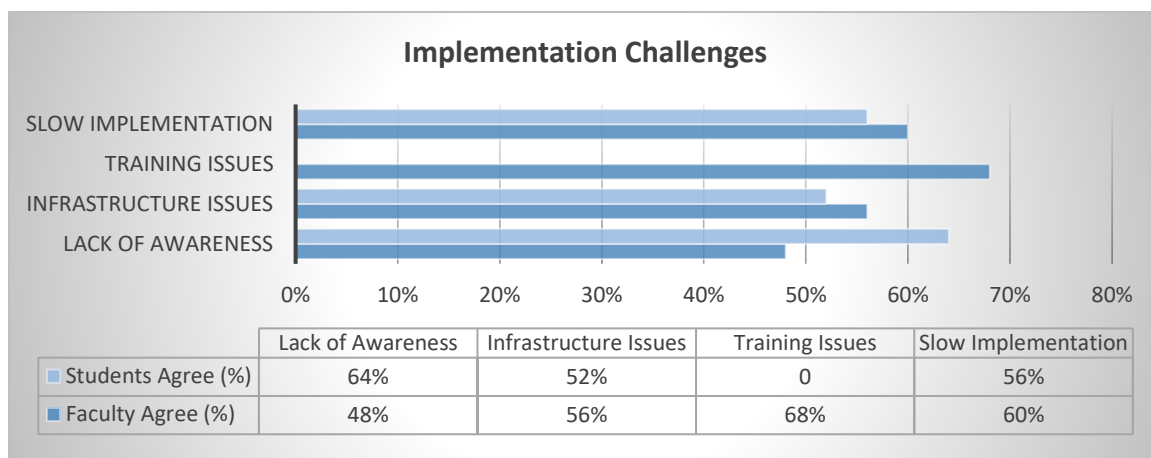
6.3 Digital Infrastructure & Support



Interpretation:

Students appear slightly more comfortable with digital infrastructure compared to faculty. While both groups show moderate agreement, faculty responses indicate relatively higher dissatisfaction, suggesting the need for improved digital support and training.

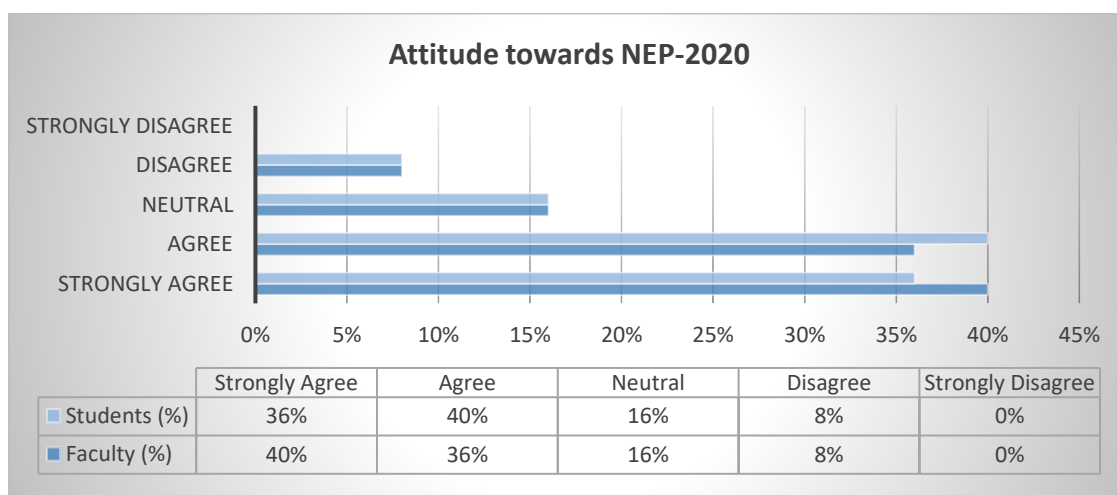
6.4 Challenges in Implementation



Interpretation:

The analysis highlights that training issues are the most significant challenge for faculty, while lack of awareness is the major concern among students. Both groups agree that implementation is slow and infrastructure needs improvement, indicating systemic challenges.

6.5 Attitude towards NEP-2020



Interpretation:

Despite various challenges, both faculty and students maintain a positive attitude towards NEP-2020. A majority believes that the policy will improve the quality of education, reflecting optimism about its long-term impact.

➤ Summary Analysis:

The percentage analysis reveals that while faculty demonstrate higher awareness and preparedness, students show moderate awareness levels. Both groups perceive the implementation of NEP-2020 as gradual and face challenges related to infrastructure, training, and awareness. However, the overall attitude towards the policy remains positive. The analysis effectively addresses all the stated objectives by examining awareness levels, perception regarding implementation, and identifying key challenges faced by faculty and students.

6.6 Comparative Insight: Faculty vs Student Perspective on NEP-2020 Implementation

Dimension	Faculty Perspective	Student Perspective	Interpretation
Awareness of NEP-2020	High level of awareness and conceptual clarity	Moderate awareness; limited understanding of key provisions	Indicates a need for awareness programs among students
Implementation Status	Viewed as gradual and partially implemented	Perceived as moderate with limited visible changes	Suggests institutions are in a transitional phase
Challenges Faced	Lack of training, curriculum restructuring issues, and limited support	Lack of awareness, limited flexibility, and infrastructural issues	Highlights stakeholder-specific challenges
Digital Readiness	Moderate comfort; need for training	Higher adaptability to digital tools	Indicates a digital skill gap among faculty
Attitude towards NEP-2020	Positive and willing to adapt	Positive but cautious	Reflects optimism with practical concerns

The comparative analysis clearly highlights the differences and similarities in perceptions between faculty and students. While faculty exhibit higher awareness and readiness, students demonstrate moderate awareness and greater adaptability to digital tools. Both groups acknowledge the gradual implementation of NEP-2020 and face distinct challenges. However, the overall attitude remains positive, indicating acceptance of the policy despite operational constraints.

7. Findings of the Study

- Higher Awareness among Faculty:**
Faculty members exhibit a significantly higher level of awareness and understanding of NEP-2020 compared to students.
- Moderate Awareness among Students:**
Students show only moderate awareness, particularly regarding key provisions such as multidisciplinary education and the Academic Bank of Credits.
- Gradual Implementation of NEP-2020:**
Both faculty and students perceive that NEP-2020 is being implemented gradually and is still in a transitional phase.
- Variation in Challenges:**
Faculty face challenges related to a lack of training, curriculum restructuring, and institutional support. Students face issues related to a lack of awareness, limited flexibility, and digital constraints
- Digital Readiness Gap:**

Students are more comfortable with digital tools, whereas faculty require further training and support for effective digital integration.

6. **Positive Attitude towards NEP-2020:**

Both groups hold a positive outlook and believe that NEP-2020 has the potential to improve the quality of higher education.

7. **Implementation Constraints:**

Infrastructure limitations and slow institutional adaptation are major barriers affecting effective implementation.

8. Conclusion

The present study attempts to assess the implementation of NEP-2020 in higher education institutions through the comparative analysis of faculty and student perceptions. The findings indicate that while faculty members possess a higher level of awareness and conceptual clarity, students demonstrate moderate awareness and limited exposure to key provisions of the policy.

The study reveals that the implementation of NEP-2020 is progressive but not uniform, with institutions currently operating in a transitional phase. Various structural and operational challenges, including lack of training, infrastructural constraints, and limited awareness, continue to hinder effective execution.

The study highlights a critical gap between the vision of NEP-2020 and its ground-level implementation, indicating that while the policy is widely accepted in principle, its practical realization remains uneven across stakeholders.

9. Suggestions:

i.) Awareness Programs for Students

Institutions should organize seminars, workshops, and orientation programs to enhance student awareness regarding NEP-2020 provisions.

ii.) Faculty Training and Capacity Building

Regular training programs and faculty development initiatives should be conducted to improve preparedness for implementing NEP reforms.

iii.) Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

Colleges should invest in improving digital resources and technological support to facilitate effective implementation.

iv.) Institutional Support and Policy Execution

Administrative support and clear guidelines are essential to ensure smooth and timely implementation of NEP-2020.

v.) Gradual but Structured Implementation

A phased and well-planned approach should be adopted to ensure effective execution without overwhelming stakeholders.

vi.) Continuous Monitoring and Feedback

Institutions should establish mechanisms for regular feedback from faculty and students to improve implementation strategies.

“Effective implementation of NEP-2020 requires not only structural reforms but also active stakeholder engagement and institutional readiness to translate policy vision into practice.”

10. Societal Implications of the Study

The present study highlights the importance of effective implementation of NEP-2020 in shaping an inclusive and quality-driven higher education system. By identifying gaps in awareness, training, and infrastructure, the study underscores the need for capacity building and institutional support to ensure equitable access to educational reforms.

Improved implementation of NEP-2020 can contribute to:

- Enhancing employability and skill development among students
- Promoting inclusive and flexible learning opportunities
- Strengthening the overall quality of higher education in India

Thus, the study provides insights that are valuable not only for educational institutions but also for policymakers in ensuring that the benefits of NEP-2020 reach all sections of society effectively.

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W14 : Reimagining Education: A Sociological Analysis of NEP 2020's Challenges and Future Outcomes

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Abstract: This paper examines the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 from a sociological perspective, focusing on its structural challenges and possible future outcomes in India. While the policy promises a more holistic, multidisciplinary, and inclusive model of education, its implementation is shaped by deep social inequalities and institutional limits. Drawing on the ideas of Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, B. R. Ambedkar, and Mahatma Gandhi, the paper understands education as both a means of social reproduction and a possible source of change.

The paper highlights uneven governance, low public investment, persistent caste and class inequality, the digital divide, and limits in pedagogy and curriculum reform. These are not only administrative problems; they are structural conditions that shape both access to education and the social effects it produces.

Using a scenario-based approach, the paper argues that NEP 2020 can support inclusion and social mobility only if implementation is backed by stronger institutions and a more equal distribution of resources. Otherwise, the policy may reproduce old inequalities in new forms. Its transformative promise depends less on policy language alone and more on a sustained commitment to structural change and social justice.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020; Sociology of Education; Social Inequality; Cultural Capital; Social Reproduction; Social Transformation; Digital Divide; Educational Reform; India

Introduction:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced by the Government of India in 2020, represents a significant shift in the trajectory of educational reform, marking the first comprehensive policy framework in over three decades. The policy envisions a transformation of the education system through a focus on holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning, while aligning education with the emerging demands of a global knowledge economy (Government of India, 2020). Emphasizing equity, access, quality, and accountability, NEP 2020 positions education as a central instrument for national development and social progress. This vision resonates with global policy discourses that link education to human capital formation and economic growth, as reflected in the World Development Report (World Bank, 2018, p. 5) and UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2020, p. 15).

Despite its transformative aspirations, NEP 2020 must be situated within the broader context of India's deeply unequal social structure, characterized by persistent disparities based on class, caste, gender, and region. As Tilak (2020, p. 47) argues, educational reforms in India have historically been constrained by inadequate public investment and increasing privatization, limiting their capacity to ensure equitable access. Similarly, Jayaram (2020, p. 24) highlights that the expansion

of higher education has often resulted in “massification without equity,” reinforcing rather than reducing social inequalities.

This paper critically examines NEP 2020 through a sociological lens by addressing two key questions: first, what structural challenges constrain its implementation; and second, what future outcomes may emerge depending on how these challenges are addressed. It argues that NEP 2020 represents a site of tension between transformative potential and structural limitations, where outcomes remain contingent upon broader socio-economic and institutional dynamics.

Literature Review:

Sociological analyses of education have long emphasized its dual role as both a mechanism of social reproduction and a potential instrument of transformation. Marx’s analysis situates education within the broader ideological framework of capitalist society, where institutions contribute to the reproduction of labour power and class relations (Marx, 1990, p. 715; Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 66). Building on this, Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital highlights how educational systems privilege dominant social groups by valuing specific cultural competencies, thereby reinforcing inequality (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 60). Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 35) argue that educational institutions systematically reproduce social hierarchies through everyday practices.

In contrast, transformative perspectives emphasize the emancipatory potential of education. Ambedkar (2014, p. 80) viewed education as a crucial tool for challenging caste-based inequalities and enabling marginalized communities to assert their rights. Gandhi’s concept of Nai Talim similarly proposed an alternative model of education rooted in ethical development, self-reliance, and the integration of manual and intellectual labour (Gandhi, 1951, p. 15). Illich (1971, p. 47) further critiques institutionalized education for reinforcing dependency and social control, suggesting the need for more flexible and learner-centered approaches.

Contemporary scholarship on NEP 2020 reflects these theoretical tensions. Tilak (2020, p. 47) highlights the challenges posed by inadequate public investment and growing privatization, while Jayaram (2020, p. 24) points to the persistence of inequality despite the expansion of higher education. Kumar (2019, p. 12) emphasizes the importance of pedagogical reform, arguing that meaningful change requires transformation in both curriculum and classroom practices. If we take all these points together, these perspectives suggest that the outcomes of NEP 2020 remain contingent upon its ability to address underlying structural landscape and inequalities.

Objectives of the Study

- To critically examine the National Education Policy 2020 from a sociological perspective.
- To identify the structural challenges in its implementation within the Indian context.
- To explore possible future outcomes based on different scenarios of policy implementation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, based on a critical review of policy documents, academic literature, and theoretical texts. The primary source of analysis is the *National Education Policy 2020* (Government of India 2020), supplemented by reports from international organizations such as UNESCO (2020) and the World Bank (2018).

The paper further engages with secondary literature, including journal articles and scholarly works that examine the challenges and implications of NEP 2020 in sociological framework. To provide a deeper analytical framework, the study draws on the theoretical perspectives of Karl Marx, Pierre Bourdieu, B. R. Ambedkar, and Mahatma Gandhi, among others.

Rather than relying on empirical data collection, the paper applies a theoretical and interpretive method, with the aim of situating NEP 2020 within broader debates on education, inequality, and social transformation.

This approach allows for a critical understanding of the structural constraints shaping the policy's implementation and its potential future trajectories.

Structural Challenges in the Implementation of NEP 2020

- The implementation of NEP 2020 is not simply an administrative matter. It is shaped by institutional capacity, public resources, and persistent social inequality. Although the policy presents a transformative vision of holistic and inclusive education, its realization depends on the wider socio-economic and institutional context. These challenges are structural rather than merely technical, and they influence both access and outcomes.
- One major challenge lies in governance. India's education system depends on coordination between the centre, the states, and multiple regulatory bodies, which often produces uneven implementation across regions (Sharma & Kumar, 2021). Institutional capacity also varies widely, especially in state-level bodies and public universities. The shift toward multidisciplinary institutions adds further complexity. As Jayaram (2020, p. 23) notes, higher education in India has often expanded without comparable improvements in governance and infrastructure, raising doubts about whether policy goals can be effectively translated into practice.
- Economic constraints are equally important. NEP 2020 repeats the long-standing goal of spending 6 percent of GDP on education, yet public expenditure remains below that level. Tilak (2020, p. 46) argues that weak public investment has limited equitable expansion and increased dependence on private institutions. This has strengthened the commercialization of education, where access is shaped more by economic capacity. From a political economy perspective, the policy's emphasis on skill development and employability may deepen this trend unless it is balanced by a stronger commitment to equity and public provision.
- Social inequality remains a central obstacle to the implementation of NEP 2020. Disparities based on caste, class, gender, and region continue to shape educational opportunities despite policy commitments to inclusion. Ambedkar (2014, p. 79) saw education as a means of emancipation, yet structural barriers still limit that possibility for many communities. Students from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds often face poor infrastructure, limited academic support, and weaker access to quality institutions (Mishra & Pandey, 2021; Singh, 2022). In this context, the flexibility and choice promoted by NEP 2020 may benefit those who already possess greater social and cultural advantage.

- The digital divide is another major challenge, especially because the policy strongly emphasizes technology-enabled learning. Although digital platforms can widen access, their benefits remain uneven because of differences in connectivity, device ownership, and digital literacy. Selwyn (2020, p. 4) argues that digital education often reproduces existing inequalities rather than overcoming them. In the Indian context, this suggests that digital expansion without adequate infrastructure and support may deepen exclusion instead of reducing it.
- Pedagogy and curriculum present a final challenge. NEP 2020 calls for a shift from rote learning to critical, experiential, and multidisciplinary education, but this requires much more than policy language. It depends on teacher training, institutional culture, and classroom practice. As Batra (2021) notes, teacher education in India remains underdeveloped. Without addressing these foundations, curricular reform may remain mostly formal rather than substantive.

Future Outcomes and Transformative Possibilities of NEP 2020

- The future trajectory of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 cannot be understood as a fixed or linear outcome; rather, it is contingent upon how effectively the structural challenges outlined earlier are addressed. From a sociological perspective, educational reform operates within a dynamic interaction between policy intent, institutional capacity, and existing social structures. As a result, the outcomes of NEP 2020 are likely to unfold along multiple trajectories, reflecting varying degrees of transformation, continuity, and contradiction.
- One possible situation is that of transformative inclusion, wherein effective implementation enables education to function as a tool for social mobility and democratic participation. This scenario presupposes increased public investment, improved institutional coordination, and equitable access to educational and digital resources. Under such conditions, education can contribute to reducing structural inequalities by expanding opportunities for historically marginalized groups. Ambedkar (2014, p. 80) emphasized that education has the potential to challenge entrenched social hierarchies and enable individuals to assert their rights, while UNESCO (2020, p. 18) highlights the role of inclusive education in fostering social cohesion and sustainable development. In this context, NEP 2020 may lead not only to improvements in educational access and quality but also to broader social changes, including enhanced mobility, greater participation in public life, and a gradual weakening of rigid social boundaries.
- A second trajectory may be characterized as partial or uneven transformation, where the implementation of NEP 2020 produces differentiated outcomes across regions and institutions. In this scenario, certain institutions—particularly those with better infrastructure and resources—may successfully adopt multidisciplinary and flexible educational models, while others struggle due to institutional and economic constraints. As Sharma and Kumar (2021) and Kaur (2022) suggest, variations in governance capacity and infrastructural readiness can significantly influence policy outcomes. Drawing on Bourdieu's framework, such uneven implementation may reinforce existing inequalities, as students from socio-economically privileged backgrounds are better positioned to benefit from educational reforms (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 34). Consequently, while the policy may lead to improvements in certain contexts, it may fall short of achieving its broader goals of equity and inclusion.

- A third and more critical condition involves the reproduction of inequality, wherein the structural constraints of the education system remain largely unaddressed. In such a scenario, ongoing trends such as privatization, underinvestment in public education, and digital exclusion may intensify existing disparities. Tilak (2020, p. 47) warns that the expansion of private education can deepen inequalities by linking access to economic capacity, while Selwyn (2020, p. 3) argues that digitalization often produces new forms of exclusion rather than eliminating existing ones. From a Marxist perspective, this trajectory reflects the continued alignment of education with market imperatives, where institutions contribute to the reproduction of class divisions (Marx, 1990, p. 714). In the Indian context, these processes may intersect with caste-based inequalities, leading to the persistence of hierarchical structures in modified forms rather than their elimination.
- It is important to note that these trajectories are not mutually exclusive. Given the diversity of the Indian educational landscape, elements of all three scenarios may coexist across different regions and institutional settings. The future of NEP 2020 is therefore analytically understood as an uneven and contested process, shaped by ongoing interactions between policy design, institutional realities, and broader social forces. Ultimately, the extent to which NEP 2020 can realize its transformative potential depends on whether it is able to address the structural inequalities that continue to shape educational access and outcomes.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper situates the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 within a broader sociological framework, highlighting the inherent tension between its transformative aspirations and the structural constraints that shape its implementation. While the policy articulates a progressive vision of holistic, inclusive, and multidisciplinary education, its realization remains contingent upon the socio-economic and institutional conditions of Indian society. As the discussion has demonstrated, challenges related to governance, public investment, social inequality, digital access, and pedagogy are not merely technical or administrative concerns, but reflections of deeper structural realities that continue to influence educational access and outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, the dual nature of education as both a mechanism of social reproduction and a potential instrument of transformation remains central to understanding the trajectory of NEP 2020. Marx's (1990, p. 714) analysis underscores how educational institutions may reproduce existing class relations, while Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 35) highlight the role of cultural capital in sustaining social hierarchies. At the same time, the emancipatory visions articulated by Ambedkar (2014, p. 80) and Gandhi (1951, p. 15) remind us that education can serve as a powerful tool for social justice when it is aligned with principles of equality, dignity, and collective development. This duality suggests that the outcomes of NEP 2020 will depend not only on its policy framework but on the broader social conditions within which it is implemented.

In this context, realizing the transformative potential of NEP 2020 requires a sustained commitment to strengthening public education as a foundational pillar of the system. Greater public investment is essential not only for expanding access but also for ensuring quality and equity across regions and institutions. At the same time, addressing social disparities requires targeted efforts to support

marginalized communities, recognizing that formal access alone does not guarantee meaningful inclusion. The expansion of digital education, while offering new possibilities, must be accompanied by equitable infrastructure and access so that technological advancements do not reinforce existing inequalities. Similarly, institutional reforms should move toward more decentralized and participatory governance structures, enabling local adaptation and greater accountability within the education system.

Equally important is the need to transform pedagogy and curriculum in a manner that goes beyond formal policy prescriptions. The shift from rote learning to critical and experiential education depends on the active role of teachers, whose training, autonomy, and professional development must be strengthened. Without empowering teachers as key agents of change, pedagogical reforms risk remaining superficial. Furthermore, the integration of vocational education should be approached carefully to ensure that it does not reinforce existing social hierarchies, particularly those linked to caste and labour divisions, but instead contributes to a more inclusive and dignified understanding of work.

Ultimately, the future of NEP 2020 lies in its capacity to move beyond policy intent and engage with the structural inequalities that have historically shaped the Indian education system. If these underlying conditions are meaningfully addressed, the policy holds the potential to contribute to greater social mobility, inclusion, and democratic participation. However, if such challenges persist, there remains a risk that existing inequalities will be reproduced in new forms. Reimagining education, therefore, requires not only policy reform but a broader commitment to social transformation. In this sense, NEP 2020 should be understood as an ongoing and contested project, whose outcomes will be shaped by the continuous interaction between policy, institutions, and society.

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W20: Bridging The Digital Divide in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges of Technology Integration under National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract: The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly influenced the higher education landscape in India under the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This study examines the opportunities and challenges associated with technology integration in Indian higher education under NEP 2020. The study evaluates the impact of digital education on accessibility, quality, and inclusiveness in higher education. It adopts a descriptive and analytical approach using secondary data collected from government reports, policy documents, and academic literature. The findings reveal that digital education enhances flexible learning, access to global knowledge resources, and institutional outreach; however, its effectiveness is constrained by a triple-layer digital divide comprising disparities in connectivity, device availability, and digital literacy. These challenges are particularly significant among rural and economically weaker sections. The study contributes by developing a triple-layer digital divide framework focusing on connectivity, device access, and digital literacy.

The study suggests that strengthening digital infrastructure, improving digital literacy, and ensuring inclusive policy implementation are essential for reducing these disparities. The paper emphasizes the importance of equitable and inclusive strategies for effective technology-enabled higher education.

Keywords: Digital Education, Digital Divide, Higher Education, NEP 2020, ICT, Digital Literacy

1. Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of national development. In recent decades, the rapid growth of digital technology has significantly influenced the global education sector. The integration of technology in education has led to the development of digital learning environments that provide wider access to knowledge and innovative learning opportunities. Digital education refers to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support teaching and learning processes. It includes online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, digital libraries, multimedia resources, and Learning Management Systems (LMS) that facilitate the dissemination of knowledge beyond traditional classroom settings. In India, the adoption of digital education has accelerated significantly in recent years. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major policy reform that places technology at the center of the Indian education system. The policy emphasizes the use of digital tools to improve quality, accessibility, and inclusiveness in higher education.

The importance of digital education became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when educational institutions were compelled to shift from conventional classroom teaching to online learning modes. Universities and colleges adopted digital platforms to continue academic activities and maintain continuity in education despite mobility restrictions and institutional closures (UNESCO, 2021). However, the transition to digital education also exposed existing inequalities in access to technology and digital resources. Many students were unable to participate effectively in

online learning due to inadequate internet connectivity, lack of digital devices, and limited digital literacy. Bridging the digital divide is therefore essential for ensuring equitable access to digital education. The NEP 2020 recognizes these challenges and proposes several measures to strengthen digital infrastructure and promote technology-enabled learning. This paper examines the opportunities and challenges associated with technology integration in Indian higher education and analyzes how the strategies proposed under NEP 2020 can contribute to reducing the digital divide and promoting equitable access to education.

2. Review of Literature

- Existing literature identifies the digital divide as a multi-dimensional issue involving disparities in internet access, availability of digital devices, and digital literacy, all of which significantly influence learning outcomes in higher education. Studies indicate that students from rural areas and economically weaker sections face greater barriers in accessing digital learning opportunities.
- Research on EdTech adoption suggests that digital platforms and LMS improve accessibility, flexibility, and continuity in education. However, scholars also report challenges related to infrastructure limitations, technological readiness, and digital competence among students and teachers.
- Studies examining the implementation of NEP 2020 highlight strong policy support for technology integration through initiatives such as SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, and digital infrastructure development. However, existing evidence indicates significant implementation gaps, particularly in rural and underdeveloped regions.
- The literature collectively highlights the need for an integrated policy approach that combines digital infrastructure, affordable technological access, digital literacy, and inclusive implementation strategies. However, limited research has systematically examined the relationship between technology integration and the multi-layered digital divide in Indian higher education under NEP 2020.

3. Research Gap and Contribution

Existing studies on digital education and NEP 2020 primarily examine individual dimensions of the digital divide, such as internet connectivity, device availability, or digital literacy. While these studies provide useful insights, they generally analyze these factors in isolation and do not provide an integrated understanding of their combined impact on higher education.

Further, most existing research focuses either on policy provisions under NEP 2020 or on implementation challenges, without adequately connecting policy intentions with ground-level realities in a unified analytical framework. As a result, the interaction between technology-enabled opportunities and structural inequalities in higher education remains underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study proposes a triple-layer digital divide framework comprising connectivity, device access, and digital literacy. It further provides an integrated analysis of how opportunities created through technology integration under NEP 2020 interact with these barriers, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of digital inequality in Indian higher education.

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the impact of digital technology on the Indian higher education landscape within the framework of the National Education Policy 2020. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine the transformative role of digital education in modernizing higher education institutions in India.
- To analyze the specific opportunities provided by technology integration as proposed under NEP 2020.
- To identify the challenges associated with the digital divide in higher education.
- To suggest practical strategies and policy recommendations for bridging the digital divide to ensure inclusive and equitable digital learning.

5. Research Methodology

The present research study is based on secondary data. The required data has been collected from multiple credible sources including government reports, research papers, books, policy documents, and academic publications related to digital education and higher education in the Indian context. Important sources include reports published by the Ministry of Education, All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), international organizations, and scholarly journals. The collected information has been analyzed using a descriptive and analytical framework to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with technology integration in higher education.

6. Digital Education in Higher Education

As discussed earlier digital education goes beyond traditional methods by allowing students to access educational resources, participate in virtual classrooms, and engage in collaborative learning regardless of their physical location.

6.1 Digital Initiatives in India

The Government of India has launched several key initiatives to create a technology-enabled learning ecosystem. These platforms are designed to improve the quality of education and make it accessible to students across the country:

- SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds): An integrated platform for online courses using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- SWAYAM Prabha: A group of DTH channels dedicated to telecasting high-quality educational programs 24/7.
- National Digital Library of India (NDLI): A virtual repository of learning resources that provides support to all academic levels.
- Virtual Labs: A project that provides remote access to laboratories in various disciplines of Science and Engineering.

6.2 Impact on Higher Education

In recent years, the importance of digital education has grown significantly. Universities and colleges are increasingly adopting LMS and digital tools to reach a wider audience. This integration

allows institutions to deliver high-quality content while providing students with the flexibility to learn at their own pace.

6.3 NEP 2020 and Technology

The NEP 2020 provides a strong roadmap for the future of digital education. It proposes the development of a National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to exchange ideas on the use of technology. The policy also emphasizes the need for:

- Building robust digital infrastructure in all educational institutions.
- Developing high-quality online learning platforms and content.
- Promoting digital literacy among both students and teachers to ensure they can use these tools effectively.

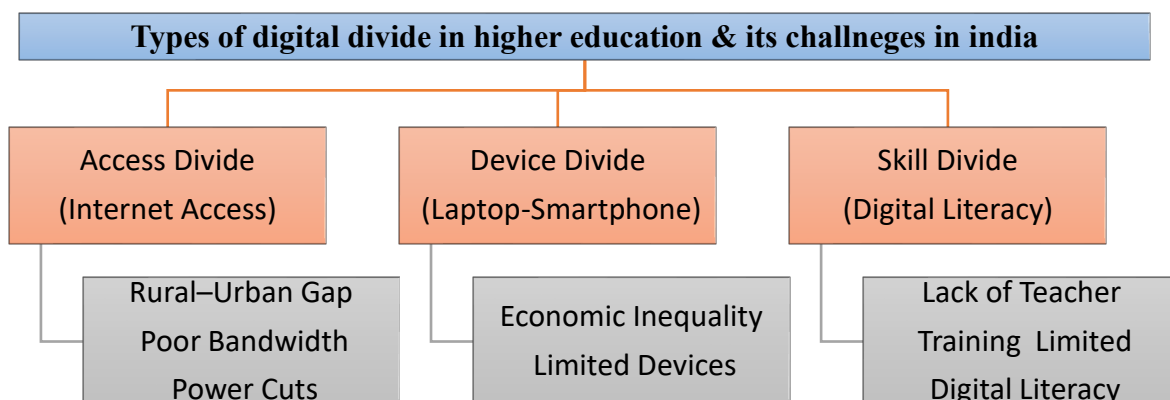
7. Digital Divide in Indian Higher Education

In the context of higher education in India, the digital divide has become a significant concern, particularly with the increasing emphasis on technology-enabled learning under the NEP 2020.

7.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates how the ambitious goals of NEP 2020 interact with existing social and economic realities. While the policy provides a roadmap for digital infrastructure and online platforms, its success depends on overcoming three primary levels of the digital divide:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Digital Divide in Higher Education



The above figure illustrates that the digital divide arises from three major factors: access to internet connectivity, availability of digital devices, and digital literacy among students and teachers.

1. The Access Divide (Connectivity): This refers to the physical availability of the internet. In India, there is a significant disparity in bandwidth and network stability between urban hubs and remote rural areas.
2. The Device Divide (Hardware): This involves the ownership of high-quality digital tools. Students from affluent backgrounds often have personal laptops, whereas students from economically weaker sections may rely solely on shared smartphones, which are not always suitable for complex academic work.

3. The Skill Divide (Digital Literacy): This represents the "usage gap." Even with a device and internet, many students and teachers lack the formal training required to navigate advanced LMS or digital research databases.

8. Results

The results of the study highlight that the implementation of technology under NEP 2020 has generated a range of opportunities, including enhanced access, flexibility, and global learning exposure, while simultaneously presenting critical challenges such as digital inequality, infrastructural gaps, and skill limitations.

8.1 Opportunities of Technology Integration in Higher Education

The integration of technology in higher education is not just a digital shift; it is a fundamental change in how knowledge is delivered and consumed. It offers several key opportunities to enhance the quality and reach of Indian higher education.

- ✓ **Increased Access to Education:** Digital platforms remove geographical barriers. Students in remote or rural areas can now access the same high-quality lectures and digital libraries as those in urban centers, reducing the need for expensive relocation to educational hubs.
- ✓ **Flexible Learning Opportunities:** Digital education allows for "anytime, anywhere" learning. This flexibility is vital for the Indian context, where many students may be working or have family responsibilities. Recorded lectures and online assignments allow students to learn at their own pace.
- ✓ **Innovative Teaching Methods:** Technology allows educators to move beyond traditional chalk-and-talk methods. By using multimedia presentations, interactive modules, and virtual simulations, teachers can make complex concepts easier to understand, leading to better student engagement.
- ✓ **Access to Global Knowledge Resources:** Digital education allows students and educators to access international academic resources, research publications, and global knowledge networks. This promotes academic collaboration and exposure to diverse perspectives which helps in raising the standard of local research and learning.
- ✓ **Cost Efficiency:** Digital education is highly sustainable. It reduces the costs associated with physical infrastructure, travel, and large-scale printing of study materials. Digital resources are easily updated, ensuring that students always have access to the latest information without additional costs.

8.2. Challenges of the Digital Divide

While technology integration offers a promising future, several structural and socio-economic barriers continue to hinder its effective implementation in India. These challenges prevent the benefits of NEP 2020 from reaching every student equally.

- ✓ **Limited Internet Connectivity :** A major hurdle is the "connectivity gap." While urban centers enjoy high-speed 4G and 5G networks, many rural and remote areas in India still suffer from inconsistent internet coverage and low bandwidth. This makes it difficult for students to attend live virtual classes or download heavy educational materials.
- ✓ **Lack of Institutional Infrastructure:** Many higher education institutions, particularly government colleges in smaller towns, lack the necessary digital infrastructure. This includes a

shortage of modern computer laboratories, high-speed campus Wi-Fi, and updated digital learning tools, which limits the institution's ability to offer a truly digital learning experience.

- ✓ **Economic Inequality:** Economic status is a primary driver of the digital divide. Students from economically weaker sections (EWS) often struggle to afford personal laptops, tablets, or even consistent monthly data packs. This creates a "device divide," where affluent students have an unfair advantage over their less privileged peers.
- ✓ **Low Digital Literacy:** Having a device is only half the battle; knowing how to use it for learning is the other half. Many students and teachers lack the formal training required to navigate complex online platforms or use digital research tools. Without proper capacity building, technology can become a source of frustration rather than a tool for learning.
- ✓ **Language and Content Barriers:** In India, a vast majority of high-quality digital educational content is available only in English. For students coming from vernacular (regional language) backgrounds, this creates a significant barrier to understanding. The lack of localized digital content remains a major obstacle to inclusive education.

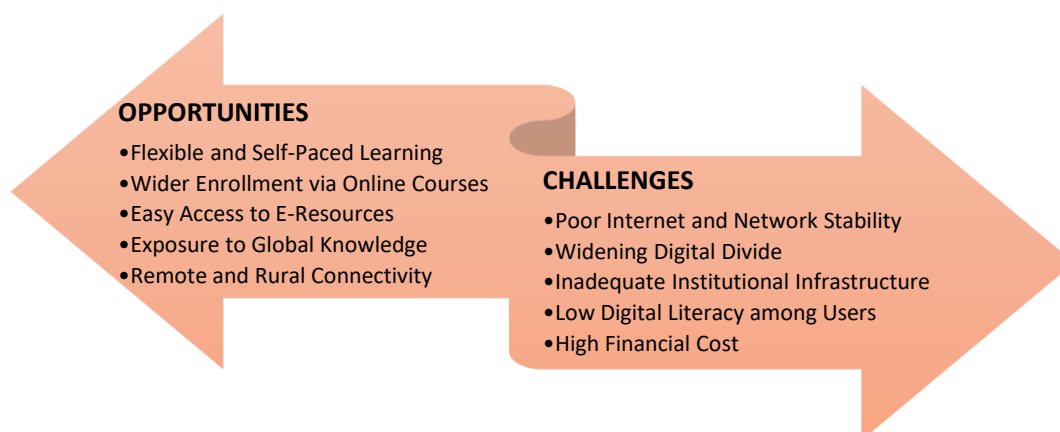
While the above results highlight the major opportunities and challenges, a deeper interpretation is required to understand their broader implications. This is discussed in the following section.

9. Discussion

The findings of the study highlight that while technology integration under NEP 2020 has created significant opportunities such as increased access, flexible learning, and global exposure, these benefits are unevenly distributed due to the persistent digital divide. The results indicate that the triple-layer digital divide (access, device, and skill) continues to limit the effectiveness of digital education, especially for students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds. This suggests that policy initiatives, though well-designed, face challenges at the implementation level. The discussion also shows that opportunities and challenges are closely interconnected, where each technological advancement is accompanied by a corresponding barrier. Therefore, bridging the digital divide requires not only technological solutions but also socio-economic and institutional support.

Linkage between Opportunities of Technology Integration and Challenges of the Digital Divide

Figure 2: Opportunities and Challenges of Digital Education



The above figure shows a comparison of the **opportunities and challenges of digital education** by linking each benefit with a related issue. While it provides **flexible and self-paced learning**, it is affected by **poor internet connectivity**. The advantage of **wider enrollment through online courses** is limited by the **digital divide**. Similarly, **easy access to e-resources** faces the problem of **inadequate infrastructure**, and **exposure to global knowledge** is restricted by **low digital literacy**. Although digital education improves **rural connectivity**, it also involves a **high financial cost**. Thus, each opportunity is associated with a corresponding challenge, showing the need to address these issues for effective digital learning.

10. Recommendations

To ensure that digital education is truly inclusive and reaches every corner of India, a multi-pronged approach is required. The following strategies are essential for bridging the gap:

10.1 Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

The government must accelerate projects like Bharat Net to provide high-speed fiber-optic connectivity to rural Gram Panchayats and educational institutions. Additionally, colleges should be equipped with "Smart Classrooms" and campus-wide Wi-Fi to create a seamless digital learning environment for all students.

10.2 Provision of Affordable Digital Devices

To close the "device divide," the government and institutions should implement schemes to provide subsidized or free laptops and tablets to students from EWS. Low-interest loans for educational technology and "device-sharing" libraries within colleges can also ensure that no student is left behind due to financial constraints.

10.3 Teacher Training and Capacity Building

The success of technology integration depends on the proficiency of the educators. Regular Faculty Development Programs (FDPs) should be conducted to train teachers in using LMS, creating digital content, and managing virtual classrooms. Empowering teachers with these skills is crucial for moving toward a successful "Blended Learning" model.

10.4 Development of Multilingual Digital Content

In a diverse country like India, English-only content is a barrier. Digital resources, including e-books and video lectures on platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM, should be translated into regional languages. Using AI-based translation tools can help make high-quality study material accessible to students from various linguistic backgrounds.

10.5 Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

The government should collaborate with private technology firms and telecom companies through Public-Private Partnerships. These collaborations can help in developing low-cost educational apps, providing "zero-rated" (free) data access for educational websites, and funding digital labs in government colleges through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The suggested recommendations provide a roadmap for bridging the digital divide and strengthening digital education, leading to the overall conclusion of the study.

11. Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on secondary data, which limits the ability to provide primary or empirical validation of findings. The analysis may also be affected by regional heterogeneity, as the digital divide varies significantly across different states and institutions in India. Additionally, reliance on published sources may introduce publication bias. Future research can focus on primary data collection through surveys and case studies to gain deeper insights into ground-level challenges. A mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis would further strengthen the understanding of technology integration and the digital divide in higher education.

12. Conclusion

The study concludes that while NEP 2020 has significantly promoted the integration of digital technology in education, its benefits remain uneven due to the persistent digital divide. The findings highlight that access, affordability, and digital skills continue to influence the effectiveness of technology-driven learning. Therefore, achieving inclusive digital education requires not only policy support but also focused efforts to bridge infrastructural and socio-economic gaps.

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W24 : Digital Education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Higher Education

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Abstract:

Keywords:

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, approved by India's Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, marked the first major restructuring of the country's education system in more than three decades (Kumar and Sharma). Replacing the 1986 policy, it aims to improve access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability across education. At the center of this shift lies a strong emphasis on digital learning. Rather than treating technology as a supplementary tool, NEP 2020 positions it as a means to widen educational access and reshape higher education itself. That goal became especially urgent after the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid move to online learning revealed two realities at once: digital platforms can expand learning opportunities, but access remains uneven. While some institutions adapted quickly, many struggled with weak infrastructure and persistent socio-economic barriers.

NEP 2020 envisions technology making higher education more flexible, accessible, and scalable, including support for an ambitious Gross Enrolment Ratio target of 50% by 2035 (Ministry of Education). Yet technology alone cannot deliver that change. Progress depends on whether digital expansion is paired with practical implementation, stronger institutions, and policies that ensure inclusion rather than deepen existing inequalities.

Foundations of the Digital Shift

The policy rests on a broader educational vision: developing well-rounded individuals equipped with critical thinking, creativity, and skills suited to a rapidly changing world (Ministry of Education). Recognizing that traditional systems often struggle to keep pace with technological and economic shifts, NEP 2020 proposes new institutional structures to guide digital integration. One such initiative is the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), designed as an independent platform for sharing research, ideas, and best practices on educational technology (National Educational Technology Forum). Its role extends beyond administration; it aims to ensure that technology serves learning goals rather than commercial or bureaucratic priorities.

Alongside this, the National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) seeks to connect fragmented educational systems through a unified digital framework (National Educational Technology Forum). By bringing institutional data into a common structure, it aims to improve transparency, support evidence-based decisions, and strengthen accountability.

Still, strong frameworks do not automatically translate into meaningful outcomes. Their impact depends on digital literacy, institutional preparedness, and equal access. The broader vision of NEP

2020 will succeed only if its technological ambitions are matched by policies capable of reaching students across every social and economic context.

Platform/ Initiative	Primary Function	Scale of Impact (2025-2026)
NETF	Autonomous advisory on technology integration (National Educational Technology Forum)	National policy and research enabler
NDEAR	Architectural framework for digital interoperability (National Educational Technology Forum)	Ecosystem-wide infrastructure backbone
DIKSHA	Content repository for schools and teacher training (Press Information Bureau)	182.3 million enrollments; 19,698+ courses
SWAYAM	Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for higher education (Press Information Bureau)	18,500+ courses; 6.1 crore enrollments
Anuvadini	AI-driven text and voice translation for regional languages (National Educational Technology Forum)	Multi-language translation for textbooks

Opportunities of Digital Education under NEP 2020

Digital education under NEP 2020 creates several transformative opportunities for Indian higher education.

- 1. Expansion of Access and Inclusion:** Digital platforms can overcome geographical barriers, enabling students from remote and underserved regions to access quality education. This is critical for achieving GER targets.
- 2. Flexibility and Lifelong Learning:** The introduction of modular learning through the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) allows students to move in and out of the system, promoting lifelong learning and adaptability.
- 3. Innovation in Pedagogy:** Technologies such as AI and VR enable personalized and experiential learning, moving beyond traditional lecture-based models.
- 4. Cost Efficiency and Scalability:** Online education reduces dependence on physical infrastructure, making expansion more feasible and cost-effective.
- 5. Global Integration:** Digital platforms enable collaboration with international institutions, positioning Indian higher education within a global knowledge network.

Structural Reforms: Flexibility and Credit Mobility

One of NEP 2020's most significant changes is its move toward a more flexible undergraduate system. Through the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), students can earn, store, and transfer credits across recognized institutions, with multiple exit pathways leading to certificates, diplomas, or degrees (Dalal). By late 2025, more than 2,400 higher education institutions had joined the platform, signaling broad participation in this shift (Kumar and Rani).

The idea is simple but far-reaching: students should have greater control over their educational paths. Learners can pause their studies, return later, and continue without starting over. That flexibility reflects wider global trends that favor mobility and lifelong learning.

Still, questions remain. Many institutions are cautious about accepting external credits, arguing that academic standards and disciplinary rigor could suffer (Verma). There is also concern that easier exit routes may encourage students to leave early for short-term opportunities rather than pursue deeper academic engagement. The success of ABC will depend not only on technology but on consistent regulation and cooperation across institutions.

The Digital University and New Regulations

To expand access to higher education, the University Grants Commission broadened support for online degree programs in 2025, approving over a hundred universities to offer fully online courses ("India's New Digital University 2025"). This marked a clear shift: digital education was no longer treated as an alternative but as a core part of higher education itself.

Alongside this expansion came tighter oversight. Students are now required to create a DEB-ID linked to the Academic Bank of Credits ("India's New Digital University 2025"), while universities are prohibited from outsourcing online programs to commercial agencies ("From Classrooms to Cloudrooms"). These measures aim to preserve credibility and reduce the risk of turning education into a purely commercial enterprise. Yet scaling online learning brings its own challenges, especially in maintaining academic quality and adapting practical disciplines to digital environments.

Emerging Technologies and Ethical Governance

NEP 2020 also places considerable emphasis on technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality (National Educational Technology Forum). AI can tailor learning experiences, identify gaps in student performance, and support individualized instruction, while VR offers immersive learning environments that can recreate experiences beyond the traditional classroom.

But innovation brings difficult questions. Systems built on biased data can reinforce social inequalities, and the growing collection of student information raises serious concerns about privacy and surveillance (Amballoor). Technology can improve education, but only if clear ethical standards and strong oversight evolve alongside it.

The Digital Divide and Infrastructural Gaps

NEP 2020 places digital education at the center of higher education reform, but access remains uneven. India has expanded its digital infrastructure significantly, connecting more than 2.15 lakh Gram Panchayats through optical fiber networks (Press Information Bureau). Even so, infrastructure alone does not guarantee meaningful access. Many remote regions continue to struggle with weak connectivity, unreliable services, and affordability barriers.

The deeper problem lies in inequality. Internet access remains closely tied to income, geography, and gender ("Digital Divide"). Urban households are far more connected than rural ones, and digital literacy gaps continue to limit participation, particularly for women and economically disadvantaged communities. A connection on paper means little if students lack the skills, devices, or resources to use it effectively.

This creates a difficult reality: digital education can expand opportunities, but it can also deepen existing divides. Unless investments in infrastructure are matched by affordable access and stronger digital literacy initiatives, the promise of inclusion may remain out of reach.

Regulatory Consolidation: Transition to HECI

Alongside digital reforms, the government has proposed the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to replace multiple regulatory bodies with a single framework ("What Is HECI?"). The goal is straightforward—reduce administrative overlap and create a more coherent system for regulation, funding, accreditation, and academic standards.

The shift carries clear advantages, especially for digital education. A unified structure could improve oversight, support common standards, and better align higher education policies with NEP 2020's broader goals. Still, centralization brings its own concerns. India's higher education system is vast and diverse, and institutions may resist reforms that appear to limit autonomy or impose rigid structures.

At its core, NEP 2020 rests on a difficult balancing act. Digital education promises wider access and greater flexibility, yet structural inequalities and regulatory challenges continue to shape its limits. Its long-term success will depend not simply on technological expansion, but on whether growth is matched by fairness, quality, and meaningful access for all.

Recommendations

- For digital education under NEP 2020 to succeed, technology alone will not be enough. Lasting reform depends on whether infrastructure, policy, and institutional support evolve together. Several priorities stand out.
- First, the digital divide requires urgent attention. Expanding broadband access remains essential, particularly in rural and underserved areas where weak connectivity continues to limit participation. Access also depends on affordability. Subsidized devices, community digital centers, and shared learning spaces can help ensure that digital education does not remain available only to those with resources.
- At the same time, educators need stronger support. Effective online teaching demands more than technical familiarity; it requires new approaches to instruction, assessment, and student engagement. Continuous training and professional development can help faculty adapt to changing learning environments and improve educational outcomes.
- Quality matters just as much as access. As online programs expand, regulatory systems must establish clear standards for course design, assessment, and academic integrity. Public confidence in digital education will depend on whether institutions can maintain credibility alongside scale.
- There is also a growing need for ethical oversight. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence rely heavily on student data, raising questions about privacy, transparency, and fairness. Strong safeguards and regular review mechanisms are necessary to prevent technology from reinforcing existing inequalities.
- Partnerships with private technology providers may accelerate innovation, but educational institutions must retain control over curriculum and standards. Alongside these efforts, digital

literacy programs and student support systems can help ensure that learners are not simply connected but genuinely prepared to participate.

- Ultimately, the promise of NEP 2020 rests on balance. Digital expansion can reshape higher education, but its impact will depend on whether innovation is matched by inclusion, accountability, and sustained institutional commitment.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative shift in Indian higher education, placing digital education at the center of its reform agenda. It offers significant opportunities to expand access, enhance flexibility, and modernize teaching and learning practices through initiatives such as online programs, the Academic Bank of Credits, and emerging technologies.

However, these opportunities are accompanied by critical challenges, including the digital divide, infrastructural gaps, faculty readiness, and concerns related to quality and ethical governance. Technology alone cannot drive meaningful transformation without inclusive implementation and strong institutional support.

Ultimately, the success of digital education under NEP 2020 depends on balancing innovation with equity, and scalability with quality. If implemented effectively, it has the potential to reshape Indian higher education; if not, it risks reinforcing existing disparities.

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W25&26: Digital Education and Technology Integration under NEP 2020

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Abstract: The National Education Policy 2020 represents a watershed moment in India's educational history. This article critically examines the role of digital education and technology integration as envisioned and implemented under NEP 2020. It surveys landmark initiatives such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, PM e-VIDYA, and the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), assesses key challenges including the digital divide, teacher readiness, and content standardization, and explores the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence, AR/VR, and blended learning models. The article concludes with actionable recommendations for equitable and effective implementation.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Digital Education, DIKSHA, SWAYAM, EdTech, Blended Learning, Digital Divide, NETF, AI in Education*

Introduction:

The National Education Policy 2020 represents one of the most ambitious overhauls of India's education system in decades. Replacing the 34-year-old NPE 1986, NEP 2020 charts a bold new course for Indian education — one that is equitable, multidisciplinary, rooted in Indian values, and powered by technology. Among its many forward-looking provisions, the integration of digital education and technology stands out as a cornerstone of the policy's vision. As the world rapidly shifts toward a knowledge-driven, technology-powered economy, NEP 2020 acknowledges that India's educational ecosystem must evolve. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed both the immense potential and the glaring gaps of digital learning in India. It is in this context that the policy's framework for digital education becomes not just relevant, but urgent.

This article explores the vision, achievements, challenges, and future directions of digital education and technology integration under NEP 2020, with the aim of contributing to a meaningful academic dialogue at the national level.

2. NEP 2020 and the vision for digital education

NEP 2020 dedicates significant attention to the role of technology in transforming educational delivery. It envisions technology not as a replacement for the teacher but as a powerful enabler of quality, equity, and access. The policy's digital vision rests on several key pillars:

NETF	National Educational Technology Forum — an autonomous body to provide an evidence-based platform for the exchange of ideas on educational technology at all levels.
ABC	Academic Bank of Credits — a digital repository enabling students to store and transfer academic credits across institutions, providing flexible and open learning pathways.

VLabs	Virtual Labs and Simulations — to provide remote, hands-on learning experiences in science, mathematics, and engineering to students across India.
AI & ML	Integration of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning tools to create personalised, adaptive learning environments suited to each student's pace and ability.

The policy also emphasizes the development of high-quality digital content in regional and Indian languages, recognizing that technology must be culturally inclusive to be truly effective. The creation of an open-source digital library and a national repository of e-content are central to this mission.

3. Key Achievements and Initiatives

3.1 DIKSHA — Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing

DIKSHA has emerged as India's national platform for school education, hosting thousands of e-learning resources, interactive textbooks, and teacher training modules in over 30 languages. With more than 300 million cumulative learning sessions recorded, DIKSHA represents the scale at which digital education can operate when backed by robust policy and infrastructure.

3.2 SWAYAM — Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds

SWAYAM offers free online courses from school to postgraduate level, delivered by some of India's most distinguished educators from IITs, IIMs, and central universities. It has fundamentally democratized access to quality higher education, enabling students in remote areas to learn from faculty at the nation's premier institutions. With over 12 million enrollments, SWAYAM stands as a landmark achievement.

3.3 PM e-VIDYA

Launched as an emergency response to the pandemic and subsequently institutionalized under NEP 2020's framework, PM e-VIDYA integrates multiple delivery channels — DTH television channels (one per grade for Classes 1–12), radio, podcasts, and online content — to reach learners who lack reliable internet access. This multi-modal approach reflects a mature understanding of India's diverse digital landscape.

3.4 Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)

The ABC is a transformative digital construct that allows students to accumulate, store, and transfer academic credits across recognized higher education institutions. It enables students to exit and re-enter degree programmes, choose courses from multiple institutions, and build customized learning pathways — all tracked digitally.

Table 1: Key Digital Education Initiatives under NEP 2020 — Snapshot

Initiative	Platform	Beneficiaries	Status
DIKSHA	Online Portal	30 Cr+ Users	Active
SWAYAM	MOOCs	1.2 Cr Enrolled	Active

AARSI – A Peer Reviewed Multidisciplinary Annual Journal		ISSN-2231-2897	Vol. 04	Issue 04
PM e-VIDYA	TV / Radio / Web	Pan-India	Active	
ABC (Academic Bank)	Digital Credits	Higher Ed Students	Expanding	

4. Challenges in Implementation:

Despite substantial achievements, the path to full digital integration in Indian education is fraught with complex, multi-layered challenges. Addressing these is central to the success of NEP 2020's digital vision.

4.1 The Digital Divide

The most pressing challenge is the stark disparity in digital access across India. According to NFHS and ASER reports, a significant proportion of students in rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged communities lack access to smartphones, laptops, or stable internet connectivity. Without bridging this infrastructure gap, digital education risks deepening existing socio-economic inequalities rather than reducing them.

- Only ~40% of Indian households had internet access as of recent estimates
- Rural-urban gap in device ownership remains vast
- Power supply inconsistency in remote areas further impedes digital learning

4.2 Teacher Preparedness and Training

Technology in the classroom is only as effective as the teacher using it. Many educators — particularly in smaller towns, rural schools, and aided colleges — are not adequately trained to integrate digital tools into their pedagogy. Sporadic, one-time training workshops have proven insufficient. What is required is sustained, structured capacity-building embedded within teacher education programmes.

4.3 Quality and Standardization of Digital Content

The proliferation of online educational content, while offering choice, also introduces serious quality concerns. Without robust curation, standardization, and peer-review mechanisms, students may encounter inaccurate, outdated, or pedagogically unsound material. NEP 2020's vision of a high-quality national digital content repository must be realized with rigorous editorial oversight.

4.4 Language and Accessibility Barriers

NEP 2020 strongly advocates for instruction in the mother tongue and promotion of Indian languages. However, the overwhelming majority of digital educational content remains available in English. This creates a significant barrier for students whose primary language is not English, thereby limiting the reach and effectiveness of digital initiatives.

4.5 Student Well-being and Screen Fatigue

The post-pandemic period has highlighted the psychological and physical toll of excessive screen time on students. Issues of digital fatigue, reduced attention spans, diminished social interaction, and mental health concerns must be factored into any sustainable model of digital education. Blended learning, therefore, is not merely a pedagogical preference but a well-being imperative.

5. Artificial intelligence and emerging technologies

NEP 2020 explicitly calls for the integration of AI, machine learning, and other cutting-edge technologies into education.

This vision opens transformative possibilities:

Technology	Application in Education
Adaptive AI	Personalises content, pacing, and assessment to each learner's unique needs and learning style
Virtual Reality (VR)	Creates immersive learning environments — e.g., virtual field trips to historical sites or scientific phenomena
Augmented Reality (AR)	Overlays digital information on the physical world, making abstract concepts tangible in real classrooms
Learning Analytics	Empowers educators with data-driven insights to identify at-risk students and intervene proactively
Chatbots & AI Tutors	Provides 24/7 academic support, answering student queries and offering guided practice outside class hours

The NETF, as proposed by NEP 2020, is envisioned as the apex body to guide the responsible and evidence-based adoption of these technologies. Its operationalization must be prioritized to ensure that India's EdTech ecosystem evolves in a structured, ethical, and pedagogically sound manner.

For digital education under NEP 2020 to deliver on its transformative promise, a comprehensive and coordinated strategy is essential. The following recommendations are offered:

- **Universal Digital Infrastructure:** Prioritize last-mile internet connectivity and device access in rural, tribal, and semi-urban areas through public investment and public-private partnerships.
- **Sustained Teacher Capacity Building:** Embed digital literacy as a core, ongoing component of teacher education and professional development, moving beyond episodic training.
- **Multilingual Content at Scale:** Dramatically scale up the development of high-quality, curriculum-aligned digital content in regional languages, with cultural sensitivity as a guiding principle.
- **Quality Assurance Mechanisms:** Establish a robust national framework for the peer-review, curation, and quality certification of digital educational content.
- **Operationalize NETF:** Urgently constitute and empower the National Educational Technology Forum to provide evidence-based guidance on EdTech adoption and policy.
- **Promote Blended Learning:** Institutionalize blended learning models across all levels of education, ensuring digital tools complement rather than replace the irreplaceable human element of teaching.
- **Data-Driven Governance:** Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress, surface gaps, and enable real-time course correction.

7. Conclusion:

Digital education and technology integration under NEP 2020 hold immense and historically unprecedented promise for transforming India's educational landscape. From DIKSHA to

SWAYAM, from AI-powered adaptive learning to virtual laboratories, the building blocks of a robust, inclusive, and future-ready digital education ecosystem are being put in place with deliberate intent.

Yet, the true measure of NEP 2020's success will lie not in the number of platforms created or courses uploaded, but in whether the benefits of digital education reach every learner — in cities and villages, in well-resourced schools and modest rural classrooms alike. The policy's vision is comprehensive; the challenge now is implementation with equity at its heart.

With sustained commitment, equitable investment, collaborative governance, and a relentless focus on the learner, NEP 2020 has the potential to harness the power of technology to make quality education a reality for every Indian — and in doing so, fulfil the promise of a truly educated and empowered nation.

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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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