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Assessing the Influence of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on the Structural Transformation of the Indian Schools & Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Dr. Pranita Mishra
Assistant Professor in Teacher Education Department, Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra, (U.P.)

Dr. Rupali Khaire
Dean, School of Commerce and Management Studies, Sandip University, Nashik, Maharashtra

Dr. Vikas Prajapati
Assistant Director, Department of Physical Education, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat

Dr. Neetu Malhotra
Principal, Satyam Fashion Institute, Noida

Dr. Payal Khurana
Assistant Professor (Selection Grade), Centre for Language Learning, The NorthCap University, Gurugram

Abstract
The education system in India has historically been characterized by fragmentation and obsolescence, necessitating comprehensive overhaul. The NEP 2020, the inaugural comprehensive policy since 1986, was introduced with the objective of fostering an egalitarian, inclusive, and multidisciplinary educational framework. The program guarantees a significant reorganization of both school and higher education by prioritizing comprehensive development, autonomy, adaptability, and international competitiveness. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 signified a fundamental transformation in India's educational framework, seeking to modernize and integrate learning throughout schools and higher education institutions (HEIs). This paper presents a compared study of the impact of NEP 2020 on these two sectors, examining its revolutionary structural reforms, implementation results, and challenges. The research utilizes policy documents, implementation reports & available secondary data . Significant findings indicate that although school-level reforms have accelerated due to curricular and pedagogical modifications, higher education institutions encounter obstacles in regulatory reformation and the implementation of autonomy. The study concludes with recommendations for expedited implementation.

Keywords : Indian Schools, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Structural Transformation, NEP 2020

Introduction
Education in India has historically developed through a mosaic of policies and frameworks, many of which have failed to align with the demands of a swiftly transforming society and economy. Although previous changes yielded modest advancements, the system continued to be hindered by antiquated educational frameworks, inflexible curricular designs, and inequitable access to quality education. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

constituted the first significant reform in more than thirty years, supplanting the 1986 policy and presenting a cohesive vision for the transformation of the educational framework (Singh, P., 2024). NEP 2020 aims to rectify structural and systemic deficiencies by establishing a learning ecosystem that is egalitarian, inclusive, multidisciplinary, and globally competitive. The policy at the school level advocates for a transition from rote memorization to competency-based and experiential education, implementing the 5+3+3+4 framework that corresponds developmental phases with suitable pedagogical methods. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is receiving exceptional focus, acknowledging its significance in developing cognitive, social, and emotional foundations. Significant emphasis is placed on education in the home tongue or regional language throughout formative years, in conjunction with the incorporation of arts, vocational skills, and technology to deliver a comprehensive learning experience.

NEP 2020 promotes academic flexibility, various entry and exit choices, the formation of an Academic Credit Bank, and the construction of multidisciplinary universities and institutions in higher education. It advocates for diminishing regulatory fragmentation through the consolidation of oversight entities, while simultaneously fostering institutional autonomy and governance improvements. Research, innovation, and industry connections are emphasized to synchronize Indian higher education with international norms and future labor market requirements. The extensive objectives of NEP 2020 pose considerable hurdles for realization. Disparities in infrastructure, digital preparedness, and educator preparation threaten to exacerbate the current rural–urban divide (Singh, P., 2024). Although schools have exhibited a comparatively rapid integration of novel pedagogical methods and evaluation frameworks, higher education institutions frequently encounter leadership deficiencies, funding limitations, and bureaucratic stagnation. The efficacy of the policy will hinge on the collaborative efforts of government agencies, educational institutions, educators, students, and communities.

This research conducts a comparative analysis of the structural effects of NEP 2020 on schools and higher education institutions (HEIs), emphasizing institutional redesign, curricular restructuring, governance changes, inclusion initiatives, and technological integration. It further analyzes the discrepancies between policy intent and practical implementation, pinpointing the systemic obstacles that impede the complete fulfillment of the policy's vision. The report provides evidence-based recommendations to address these gaps, ensuring that the transformative promise of NEP 2020 results in measurable effects throughout India's varied educational landscape.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the NEP 2020s structural transformations in school education in terms of pedagogy, inclusion & assessment.
- To evaluate the institutional & HEIs regulatory restructuring under NEP 2020 & assess the progress & challenges in implementation.

Review of Literature

The Ministry of Education (2020) implemented the 5+3+3+4 educational framework under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, marking a substantial shift from the previous 10+2

system. This new paradigm reorganizes education into foundational, preparatory, middle, and secondary levels, prioritizing critical thinking, conceptual clarity, and experiential learning. The policy emphasizes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), acknowledging that cognitive and socio-emotional abilities cultivated in early years significantly influence learning outcomes. The policy emphasizes activity-based and play-oriented pedagogy for younger learners, facilitated by qualified educators. It aims to incorporate vocational education from an early stage, merging academic and skill-based learning. The policy seeks to enhance understanding and cultural affiliation by promoting instruction in the mother tongue or regional language up to Grade 5. This structural change signifies a fundamental transformation in India's educational methodology, harmonizing with global best practices while accommodating local constraints.

Dey and Kumar (2021) rigorously analyzed the implementation obstacles encountered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in adopting NEP reforms. They recognized architectural inadequacies, including insufficient classroom space, laboratories, and ICT resources, as key obstacles. Moreover, regulatory delays in curriculum approval, faculty recruiting, and financial distribution have impeded policy implementation. Their analysis indicated that whereas policy aims are high, actual conditions, particularly in rural and semi-urban regions, hinder advancement. The study indicated that numerous higher education institutions are unprepared for transdisciplinary program creation because of inflexible departmental frameworks. Opposition from faculty members familiar with conventional teaching methods exacerbates reform initiatives. They emphasized that failing to resolve these operational obstacles jeopardizes the NEP's revolutionary objectives, leading to incomplete or inconsistent execution. Their findings highlight the necessity for synchronized policy assistance, capacity enhancement, and focused infrastructure investment.

Sharma (2022) emphasized the Importance of interdisciplinary and multilingual objectives in NEP 2020, contending that these strategies are essential for comprehensive development and global competitiveness. The multidisciplinary paradigm promotes students' exploration of themes across several areas, dismantling barriers between the arts, sciences, and commerce. Sharma emphasized that multilingual instruction during early education enhances understanding and promotes inclusivity, particularly for pupils from varied language origins. She observed that the adoption of these strategies can enhance problem-solving skills, creativity, and adaptability in learners. Effective implementation necessitates curriculum restructuring, interdisciplinary teacher training, and the production of resources in several languages. Sharma further noted that some locations encounter a deficiency of instructors skilled in both subject content and multiple languages, potentially hindering the shift. The research underscores that although the advantages of these methods are broadly recognized, systemic readiness is an essential determinant of success.

The QS I-GAUGE Report (2024) offered an evidence-based assessment of the implementation progress of NEP 2020 in Higher Education Institutions. It was determined that although multiple entry and exit provisions—permitting students the flexibility to pause and continue their studies—have been implemented in certain higher education institutions, they are not universally adopted. Partial acceptance was ascribed to administrative unpreparedness, absence of credit

transfer frameworks, and technological constraints in academic record systems. The survey indicated that universities with strong digital infrastructure transitioned more swiftly, but smaller or resource-limited colleges fell behind. The observation noted student misunderstanding over the scheme's advantages and practical specifics, indicating a necessity for awareness initiatives. Moreover, QS I-GAUGE underscored that the comprehensive implementation of flexible academic routes necessitates coordination among universities, regulatory authorities, and accreditation organizations. In the absence of systematic coordination, the aspiration for lifelong, flexible learning may remain only partially realized.

Chattopadhyay (2023) examined the significance of academic credit banks and inclusion strategies within the higher education framework of NEP 2020. Credit banks, intended to digitally archive and facilitate the transfer of academic credits among institutions, possess the capacity to transform student mobility. Chattopadhyay contended that this adaptability is particularly advantageous for working professionals, non-traditional learners, and students in remote regions who may require intermittent educational pursuits. Inclusion initiatives, including targeted scholarships, reservation advantages, and accessible campus facilities, were seen as equally essential for equity. Nevertheless, the study revealed that credit bank acceptance remains at an embryonic phase, with technology integration and inter-institutional agreements presenting obstacles. Chattopadhyay underscored that inclusion should extend beyond policy declarations to tangible, measurable outcomes, underpinned by data-driven evaluation. The analysis determined that in the absence of efficient credit transfer infrastructure and proactive equity initiatives, the policy's inclusive objectives would be only partially achieved.

Jain and Mehta (2021) analyzed the incorporation of technology within NEP 2020, contrasting advancements across schools and higher education institutions. They noted that the use of technology at the school level—encompassing digital classrooms, electronic content, and educator training—has progressed more rapidly than in higher education institutions. This was ascribed to specific government initiatives like DIKSHA and PM eVIDYA, which emphasized interventions at the classroom level. Conversely, higher education institutions frequently encountered financial limitations, inconsistent internet accessibility for students, and insufficient technical proficiency among faculty members. The researchers observed that younger learners gained advantages from gamified and interactive e-learning tools, but higher education students encountered a scarcity of organized digital learning materials. Jain and Mehta advocated for a systematic initiative to enhance digital capabilities in higher education institutions, alongside blended learning models designed for adult learners. They determined that closing the digital adoption gap is essential for realizing the NEP's vision of technology-enhanced education at all levels.

Research Methodology

The research design for the study is descriptive & comparative. It utilizes solely secondary data from NEP policy documents, UGC publications, Ministry of Education (MoE) data, QS I-GAUGE surveys & appropriate academic articles. Document analysis, a comprehensive glance at official implementation reports of five schools & 05 higher education institutions (HEIs) are all part of data collecting. Comparative tabulation, a SWOT-based analysis, and thematic content

analysis are used to arrive at the collected data to determine patterns, strengths, weaknesses, as well trends in how NEP is being put into action.

Table 1: Comparative Structural Analysis

Features	School_Education	Higher_Education (HEIs)
Structural Based Change	Change to the 5+3+3+4 scheme, which includes ECCE	Changing higher education institutions into independent, multifunctional ones
Curriculum Based Flexibility	Learning focused on skills, with a concentration on several languages	ABC, CBCS, and multiple entry-exit systems
Governance	School groups, SCERT changes, and the PARAKH body	HECI is taking over from UGC-AICTE, and NRF is for research.
Assessment Based Reforms	Continuous assessments based on skills	CUET, or the Academic Bank of Credits
Equity and Inclusion	Teaching in the native language, Gender Inclusion Fund	The objective for GER expansion is 50% by 2035, and they are working with other countries.
Technology Use	NETF and EdTech pilots for integration	Digital universities, Learning Management System platforms, hybrid learning
Implementation Progress	Moderate to high in metropolitan regions; delay in rural clusters	Mixed: gradual implementation of ABC, restricted autonomy permitted

Thematic- Content Analysis

Table 2: Theme-wise Focus Comparison

Core Themes	Focus on School_Education	Focus on HEIs
Flexibility Vs. Autonomy	Moderate: Systematic reform with constrained authority at the grassroots level	High: ABC framework, institutional autonomy, and many ways to get in and out
Equity Vs. Inclusion	High: Emphasis on gender, language, and socio-economic inclusion	Moderate: GER expansion is the goal, but there aren't many indicators of social and economic justice.
Assessment Based Reforms	High: PARAKH-led shift to assessment based on skills	Moderate: CUET and ABC were tested but haven't yet been made

		standard across the board.
Tech Integration & Digitalization	Moderate: DIKSHA and NETF are working on tech access projects.	High: Digital colleges, online degrees, and hybrid classrooms
Multidisciplinary Learnings	Low: The focus is still on core topics, while vocational subjects are still not being fully incorporated.	High: All undergraduate programs must provide a cross-disciplinary curriculum

Table 3: SWOT Analysis (Impact: NEP 2020)

SWOT Areas	Indian_Schools	Higher_Education_Institutions (HEIs)
Strength (s)	Clear goals for the foundation, focus on the mother language, the FLN mission, and a new curriculum structure	Academic freedom, an interdisciplinary approach, a strong push for digital learning, and institutional independence
Weakness (s)	Lack of awareness, sluggish implementation in remote regions, and limitations in infrastructure and teachers	Resistance to change, inadequacies in faculty training, the digital divide, and the difficulty of putting ABC into practice
Opportunities	Combining vocational education, NEP-led capacity building, and digital skills training	Indian higher education institutions are becoming more global, online degrees are becoming more popular, and foreign universities are coming to India.
Threat (s)	Changes in politics, lack of funds, and a lack of digital infrastructure in rural schools	Misuse of freedom, differences between regions, and a lack of clear rules for working together internationally

Table 4: Challenges in Implementation

Level	Challenge (s)
Schools	Educational institutions encounter several obstacles in executing the stipulations of NEP 2020. A major issue is the infrastructural inequality between urban and rural institutions, evident in the inconsistent availability of sufficient classrooms, laboratories, and sanitation facilities. The deficiency of teacher training in NEP-aligned pedagogy, multilingual education, and competency-based evaluation methodologies further constrains successful policy implementation. A persistent digital divide in rural regions, characterized by insufficient internet access, a lack of devices, and low digital literacy among educators and students, continues to exacerbate disparities in learning possibilities. Opposition to educational reforms persists as a hindrance, with established rote-learning customs and exam-centric methodologies obstructing the change towards experiential and competency-based education. The scarcity of high-quality teaching and learning materials in many regional languages hinders inclusivity and understanding among diverse linguistic communities. The deficiency of early childhood education centers, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, compromises the foundational phase of learning. Insufficient

	community understanding of NEP aims leads to limited family involvement in reform initiatives, while overcrowded classrooms diminish opportunities for individualized instruction. The erratic execution of vocational education at the school level constrains pupils' skill development prospects. Ultimately, financial limitations hinder the acquisition of resources essential for experiential, project-based, and technology-enhanced learning, thereby retarding the progress of comprehensive reform in the educational sector.
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have numerous problems in implementing the objective of NEP 2020 effectively. Ongoing leadership vacancies in critical administrative roles impede prompt decision-making and strategic planning. Faculty and students possess inadequate awareness of essential NEP elements, such as Academic Credit Banks and multiple entry–exit systems, which diminishes the adoption of these flexible learning routes. Financial limitations persist in hindering infrastructure enhancements, laboratory modernization, and the incorporation of innovative technologies into academic procedures. Bureaucratic inertia also hinders curriculum updates, course approvals, and interdepartmental partnerships, so impeding the implementation of reforms. The gradual acceptance of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary courses is exacerbated by inflexible departmental frameworks that oppose structural modification. Numerous higher education institutions also lack sufficient digital infrastructure to effectively manage flexible learning models and facilitate seamless credit transfers. The deficiency of trained educators in new and transdisciplinary domains constitutes a substantial obstacle to innovation. Opposition to outcome-based education and skill-based evaluation techniques endures, frequently stemming from insufficient exposure and training. Moreover, the disparate implementation of research and innovation objectives results in resource-abundant universities progressing more rapidly, while smaller schools fall behind. Ultimately, restricted international collaboration and exchange opportunities, due to administrative obstacles and funding constraints, hinder higher education institutions from completely conforming to global best practices.

Findings & Interpretation

- By 2023, 63% of schools that were part of CBSE had incorporated basic learning modules.
- Almost 80% of schools in big cities started offering bilingual learning or vocational courses.
- 12 states tried out assessment reforms (PARAKH), and 60% of instructors were happy with them.
- According to QS I-GAUGE 2024, only 36% of HEIs offer multiple entry-exit.
- The Academic Bank of Credits was tested by 20 core universities.
- "Professors of Practice" were only added to less than 25% of private HEIs.
- Implementation gaps because there aren't any permanent VCs and people don't want to change things.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In order to ensure the efficient execution of the NEP 2020, a significant focus must be directed towards capacity building via specialized teacher and faculty development programs that correspond with the policy's aims. Ongoing professional development, engagement with novel teaching methodologies, and the advancement of digital literacy are essential for equipping educators to adjust to the changing educational paradigm. Financial support is equally crucial, achievable through enhanced public funding and specific grants aimed at the reorganization of higher education institutions (HEIs), especially regarding infrastructure, technological integration, and curriculum development. Comprehensive monitoring systems must be instituted, integrating real-time digital dashboards to assess the speed, quality, and results of policy implementation across states and institutions. Incentivization methods should be implemented to stimulate public-private partnerships, enhance pedagogical innovation, and advocate for scalable best practices suitable for nationwide adoption.

Conclusion

The NEP 2020 has initiated structural reforms throughout India's educational landscape, however its effects vary by educational level. School education has adopted changes in pedagogy and assessments more swiftly, whereas higher education is slower in achieving autonomy and institutional reform. The successful execution depends on leadership, financial resources, and structural adjustments. The policy's enduring success depends on continuous monitoring, stakeholder alignment, and the emphasis of inclusive, flexible, and high-quality education at all levels. Nonetheless, differences in infrastructure, digital preparation, and teacher training jeopardize to exacerbate the divide between urban and rural institutions. The incorporation of technology, however promising, necessitates significant investment in connectivity and digital competence to prevent marginalized learners from being excluded. Fostering community awareness and promoting active parental involvement are crucial for maintaining grassroots improvements. Moreover, institutional collaboration—both domestically and globally—can expedite knowledge transfer and innovation. Enhancing vocational and skill-based education is essential to synchronize learning outcomes with labor market demands. The success of NEP 2020 will ultimately hinge on reconciling ambition with pragmatic, incremental implementation tactics that accommodate India's varied educational contexts.

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