



Implementation of NEP 2020 in Higher Education Libraries

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's higher education system by emphasizing holistic learning, multidisciplinary education, equity, inclusion, and the effective use of information and communication technologies. Within this framework, higher education libraries are repositioned as central components of the academic and research ecosystem rather than as auxiliary support units. This conceptual paper examines the implementation of NEP 2020 in higher education libraries by analyzing policy directives, institutional responsibilities, and emerging functional expectations. The study adopts a qualitative, theory-based approach grounded in policy analysis and library and information science literature, without relying on empirical data or statistical methods. It explores how NEP 2020 reinforces the role of libraries in digital transformation, open access initiatives, research data management, information literacy, faculty collaboration, and inclusive educational practices. Particular attention is given to governance, leadership, autonomy, funding models, capacity building, and quality assurance mechanisms that influence library effectiveness under the new policy regime. The paper also highlights challenges associated with infrastructure readiness, professional development, equitable access, and sustainable resource management. By synthesizing policy objectives with contemporary library practices, the study provides a coherent conceptual understanding of how higher education libraries can align their strategies with NEP 2020. The paper concludes that libraries are critical enablers of the policy's vision to develop India into a global knowledge society and must proactively adapt to ensure meaningful and sustained implementation.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020; Higher Education Libraries; Information Literacy; Digital Libraries; Library Governance; Inclusive Education.

1. Introduction

The higher education landscape in India has transformed significantly over the last two decades, with improvements in access, equity, quality, and inclusion in collaboration with information and communications technology and libraries (Parmar, 2019). Informed by this premise, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) adopts a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to education; envisions a paradigm shift in standards from the cohort model to a Clean Slate model predicated on basic principles, minimal regulation, and democratic participation; and proposes the establishment of a National Mission on Education through Information and Communications Technology (NMEICT), which emphasises the pivotal role of libraries in the NEP Framework; Aithal & Aithal, 2019].

Historically, the relevance of libraries in the National Policy on Education 1986, modified in 1992, was limited to information literacy skills. In parallel with the principles defined by the NEP 2020, the Library Vision Document 2014 (Deskhmukh, 2014) framed the following: (a) Academic and research libraries are essential part of the academic and research ecosystem—the bulb or lamp that illuminates the academic and research paths; (b) Academic and research libraries hold the prime responsibility of contributing to and facilitating quality education and high-quality research; (c) Libraries are equally important for higher education as schools are for the school stage; (d) With open access, repositories, open-source software, open data, free and low-cost journals, and commercial publishers, libraries have now greater responsibilities and challenges; (e) The value and need for libraries and librarians are questioned by at least some sections of the higher education and research fraternity.

NEP 2020 emphasizes that education at all levels is the most effective tool to enhance the skills, knowledge, and overall personality of the youth. It aims to transform both the school and higher education sectors to ensure holistic, multi-disciplinary, aligned with 21st century skills and future-oriented, and accessible and affordable education for all. The NEP 2020 proposes that all educational institutions, including schools, colleges, universities, vocational education institutions, and others, work in a coordinated manner based on a broad national framework to achieve the vision of education in the 21st century.

3. Relevance of libraries in the NEP 2020 framework

The NEP 2020 framework highlights the crucial role of libraries in enhancing access to quality education and fostering information literacy. The transformative landscape of higher education in India, marked by a rapid increase in colleges and universities, further amplifies the significance of libraries in supporting a conducive environment for learning and research (Parmar, 2019). As educational conglomerates, libraries undertake a diverse range of activities, including online collection development, digitization of archival materials, and the establishment of institutional repositories to proactively disseminate content to students and faculty. They also serve as pivotal knowledge hubs that empower institutions to leverage government initiatives aimed at strengthening the teaching, research, and extension functions of colleges and universities.

Amid recent global developments, the role of libraries in transforming education has garnered increasing recognition. Educational institutions are reimagining their approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment, while libraries are advocating for comprehensive policy frameworks at local, regional, and global levels. These frameworks encompass investments in library/information services, capacity-building opportunities, and strategies for shared resources that support open digital educational materials and foster collaboration in the education sector.

4. Policy directives and library infrastructure

India has a large network of institutions engaged in various academic and research pursuits, including polytechnic colleges, engineering colleges, institutes of technology, design institutes, universities, deemed-to-be universities, and research institutions. Apart from higher educational institutions, there are also national laboratories, service organizations for higher education, and skill-development institutions. Higher education remains a priority sector for the Government of India. Expenditure on higher education has to be twice the planned percentage. Access to quality higher education remains a challenge. There is an urgent need to rethink about education. Educational policies recognize that libraries play a key role in higher education during learning and knowledge generation. Libraries participate in designing new curriculum, strategy planning, faculty recruitment, resource procurement, enhancement of library facilities, digitalisation, new library service, information literacy training, multi-specialised research supports, and other quality enhancement programs in the institution. A Library Facility Plan (2002) contained a broad perspective on the development of a library and learning resource centre at the time of preparation of a strategic plan for Quality Improvement (GI) Programme (Parmar, 2019).

A successful shift towards knowledge-based society can only be ensured through efficient, time-bound Government schemes and their appropriate implementation at the grassroots level. The Government of India has firmed the national agendas with continual focus on inclusive development, with the vision of building “A New India by 2022” and also has brought a prominent shift in its approach for evolving educational policies by taking necessary steps to regain the lost glory and position of “Vishwa Guru” during early period of civilization. The next step for achieving a Grand Vision for Higher Education has been reflected in the Government initiatives and schemes with well-defined policy strategies focusing on attaining “World Class” status of Higher Educational Institutions.

To facilitate interactions and discussions on the educational policy and its impact on higher educational institutions, the All India Association for Higher Education (AIAHE) has been established. Formal correspondence for holding the symposium at various locations in the country has also been initiated. The preparation of the synopsis on various aspects for holding symposium on education policy development, preparation of higher educational strategic plan and policy formulation, and its implementation in institutions supported by National Facilities is presented to encourage on growth status of higher educational institutions incorporated with building a Knowledge Society in today's Knowledge Era.

4.1. Academic and Research Libraries System

The academic and research library system in India underpins higher education: it encompasses over 17,000 institutions. The library system's objective is to support education and research at all levels, advance knowledge through innovation, and encourage entrepreneurship. The National Mission on Education through the Information and Communication Technology synthesizes and delivers knowledge, provides end-to-end technical support, enables wide access to educational content, and coordinates curriculum development (Kumar Bhardwaj & K. Walia, 2012). The library system also seeks to provide educational content and services to academic institutions, foster innovation, facilitate knowledge exchange, and broaden opportunities through collaborative research activities.

The National Repository of Open Educational Resources enables the sharing and storage of a range of teaching, learning, and training resources. The National Content and Competency Framework incorporates MOOCs and e-content into the information chain. New delivery mechanisms by library services encourage both the receipt and dissemination of extra-academic inputs (Parmar, 2019).

4.2. National Research Data Repository and Open Access

Digital data has become critical, with over 2.5 exabytes generated daily worldwide. Organizations face challenges in managing this data, and the National Education Policy 2020 recognises that enhancing research data management capability will be beneficial in areas such as data storage, archives, repositories, workflow, and mining. Improved research data management can help stimulate research, better utilization of institutional research and learning assets, and increase reuse of research outputs between institutions.

Research data management (RDM) through a research data repository allows higher education institutions to adhere to prescriptions (NwadiutoIgwe, 2013). A RDM framework comprises the necessary policies, governance, organizational responsibilities, and services for the proper management of research data. Such a framework addresses ethical, legal, and security requirements throughout the research lifecycle and also encourages sound data management during project preparation and the writing of research proposals. Importantly, RDM facilitates greater research output visibility and reuse across the institution (K. Ho, 2019).

5. Governance, leadership, and autonomy of libraries

Good governance, leadership, and autonomy are imperative aspects for enhancing the credibility, reach, and effectiveness of academic libraries (Parmar, 2019). Libraries need to be

governed, led, and organised by experts who thoroughly understand the modern information ecosystem and the local environment. Libraries require autonomy in formulating strategies to promote access to reliable, authentic, and relevant information and knowledge, as well as to enable users to make efficient, ethical, and judicious use of these resources. They also require autonomy, resources, and devoted leadership to develop additional infrastructure (including repositories) in collaboration with institutions and other stakeholders. Flatter governance structures, built on openness, trust, and co-responsibility, are likely to enhance library performance and futures, particularly when combined with systems that encourage broader user engagement, participation, and co-ownership.

Governance structures must be proportionate and synchronised to the type, scale, and focus of libraries and higher education organisations. Governance should ensure that libraries remain relevant and engaged with users, that the allocation of resources is transparent and purposeful, and that accountability mechanisms target not only compliance with institutional controls but also progress towards the library's mission and goals.

6. Faculty roles, research, and library collaborations

Libraries are keystones in India's knowledge economy. In 2018–2019, university faculty published more than 144,000 scholarly documents, indicating an urgent need to role librarians in research and educational collaboration alongside professors and students (Parmar, 2019). Research support tends to reside with traditional metrics like library size, circulation statistics, and the number of journals offered through membership in societies (Tumbleson et al., 1970).

Faculty promotion and tenure advisories at leading universities identify peer review of papers as an essential indicator of research stature. A minimum of eight peer review positions is common at some institutions. Campus participation on editorial boards also signifies a viable academic path and supports local authors. Maintenance of citation databases and dissemination of actual citation counts can bolster their own success in obtaining promotion or tenure as well as serving community needs.

7. Access, equity, and inclusivity in library services

Access, equity, and inclusivity in education have gained importance post-Covid and within the NEP 2020 framework. Despite considerable progress under the NPE 1986 and revised NPE 1992, barriers remain, requiring concerted efforts to create a more inclusive education system. Libraries and information centers play a pivotal role in supporting the NEP's vision of equitable and inclusive education, particularly for marginalized communities, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, rural residents, women and girls, and first-generation learners (Parmar, 2019). The Academic and Research Libraries System framework also emphasizes the need for equitable access to quality resources and services for all learners.

The NEP 2020 implementation guidelines highlight strategies for promoting access, equity, and inclusivity in education and include specific directives related to libraries. These are summarized in Table 4. Institutions are expected to prepare an institutional development plan that encompasses library facilities, collections, services, and activities aligned with the NEP's vision of inclusive educational support at all levels. Strategies that have been proposed include planning library facilities, collections, services, and activities that support inclusive educational opportunities across the entire educational system; ensuring equitable access to quality library resources for all learners, including those from educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, first-generation learners, and women and girls; and providing alternate formats for library collections (for example, digital and audio formats) to support access for persons with disabilities and other underserved populations.

8. Digital libraries, metadata, and information literacy

India is moving towards an information-based economy. Digitalization of libraries has provided access to a wide range of electronic information resources. No educational institution can develop effective curricula without relevant educational resources. The best way to address the growing

demand for a wider variety of educational resources is to deploy the appropriate technology to create true digital libraries containing a variety of resources, which can be accessed remotely from anywhere. In recent years, libraries of higher education institutions have achieved varying degrees of success in the development of digital libraries, but much work remains to be done (Parmar, 2019).

The availability of electronic resources has reshaped the information-seeking behavior of library users in higher education institutions (Krishnamurthy, 2019). The need for teaching and promoting information literacy skills and competencies is recognized worldwide. Information literacy enables individuals to create new knowledge by integrating and synthesizing the information obtained from various sources.

9. Funding models and resource management

The funding of academic libraries directly affects their ability to provide quality resources and services, aligning with government policies such as NEP 2020. Struggling Indian academic libraries still manage to acquire a limited range of quality print and electronic resources despite inadequate budgets. Post-independence funding for library and information services in India has relied heavily on government grants. Building institutional capacity to generate revenues through alternate sources is therefore crucial. Many countries have developed funding models to address similar challenges. The introduction of a flexible funding policy allowing private and alternate funding, along with a clear funding structure outlining various funding sources, is gaining attention in the Indian context (Opara Nnadozie, 2013).

10. Capacity building, training, and professional development

Libraries are crucial to the higher education system in India since they support teaching, research, and extension activities. Libraries help to achieve academic excellence and information literacy, and also act as educators, knowledge managers, and shared spaces for learning (Parmar, 2019).

Library resources range from print books, e-resources, and databases to open repositories. Various services, networks and consortia have been developed, including e-learning and virtual reference services, online access to library catalogues and databases, information literacy programmes, and institutional repositories for scholarly communication (., 2013).

11. Challenges, risks, and mitigation strategies

The implementation in Higher Education Libraries aims to create a holistic educational ecosystem based on equity and inclusion through the adoption of disciplines such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Fine Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) knowledge; literature; language; liberal arts; etc. The effort has huge implications for libraries in the higher education domain, encompassing importance in the NEP 2020 framework, policy directives related to library infrastructure, governance, leadership, and autonomy of libraries, faculty roles, research and library collaborations, access, equity, and inclusivity in library services, digital libraries, metadata, and information literacy, funding models and resource management, capacity building, training and professional development, Bandwidth availability and network related issues and encouraging Inter-Institutional cooperation. In addition, it aims to mitigate both perceived and potential challenges, and to recommend coping strategies to avoid or minimize risks during the process (Fatima Wairrach & Tahira, 2009).

12. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 is intended to be a game changer in the field of education for bringing out the vital reforms, particularly at the higher education level, to convert India into a global knowledge superpower. Efforts on higher education have been made through higher education reforms that include knowledge economy, higher education unto research, and human resource management policies toward the goal of converting India into a global knowledge superpower. All these initiatives

are newly aligned according to NEP-2020 recommendations. Libraries, being the center point of information resources, services, and knowledge management, play a major role in supporting the education system and enhancing educational quality, especially in higher education, under the proposed NEP-2020. Hence, the libraries readdress the endeavors to be aligned and to support the New National Education Policy for their active participation in the higher education system toward converting India into a global knowledge superpower. These initiatives are ongoing and progressive.

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