



ENVISIONING THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN THE LANDSCAPE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the crucial role of academic libraries in accelerating the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, especially in the context of the digital environment. Focusing on NEP 2020, it elucidates how academic libraries with digitized services play a crucial role in advancing the digitization agenda of the new policy by granting students access to extensive information and knowledge reservoirs. Through an in-depth analysis, the paper sheds light on the role of academic libraries in reshaping educational delivery methods and fostering inclusive learning environments in line with the guiding principles and objectives of NEP 2020. Furthermore, the paper delves into the obstacles faced by academic libraries in effectively fulfilling their roles as outlined in NEP 2020. Overall, the paper underscores the indispensable contribution of academic libraries in navigating the educational landscape of digital India, thereby propelling the implementation of NEP 2020 towards its envisioned goals.

Keywords: *Academic Libraries, Digital Libraries, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Education Digitization, Inclusive Learning Environments.*

1. Introduction:

1.1 Background

Since independence, the development of education system of India has been shaped by various commissions and initiatives over the years, emphasizing the pivotal role of academic and public libraries. Starting with the University Education Commission of 1948-49, which

recommended improvements in higher education including better library resources and open access systems, subsequent efforts such as the Kothari Commission in 1964-66 and the National Policy on Education in 1986 continued to stress the importance of strengthening library services and embracing educational technology (Aalam & Selvan, 2022). In 2015, the introduction of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) curriculum marked a significant shift towards student-centered learning, paving the way for the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. CBCS promotes interdisciplinary learning and skill development, fostering innovation and inclusivity in higher education (Borkar & Arya, 2021). Alongside these developments, initiatives like the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in 2005 and the Digital India initiative in 2015 highlighted the importance of digital infrastructure and knowledge access. Aligned with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, India prioritized quality education as a key goal. NEP 2020, emerging from extensive consultations and feedback, represents a comprehensive framework to address India's diverse educational needs, focusing on holistic development, critical thinking, and flexibility (Walia & Manju, 2021). Key features include a flexible academic curriculum, regional language promotion, vocational education integration, and the establishment of a new higher education regulatory body. NEP 2020 signifies a transformative shift towards a more inclusive, innovative, and adaptable education system, reflecting India's commitment to preparing its youth for future challenges.

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark initiative representing the first comprehensive education policy of the 21st century. The ancient Indian educational system, rooted in enhancing human existence and societal improvement, has influenced modern education policies, as seen in the National Education Policy-2020 (Nath, 2023). It emphasizes principles like access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability, aiming to transform the educational landscape in alignment with changing socio-economic dynamics, technological advancements, and global practices. NEP 2020 emerged from extensive consultations and feedback from stakeholders nationwide, presenting a holistic framework to cater to India's diverse educational needs and prepare youth for future challenges. This policy signifies a paradigm shift in education, focusing on holistic development, critical thinking, creativity, inclusivity, and flexibility. Key highlights include a flexible academic curriculum, promotion of regional languages, integration of vocational education for practical learning, and the establishment of a new regulatory body for higher education (Ahuja, 2023).

1.2 Significance of Libraries in Devising Education Policy

Libraries are integral to the Indian education system, serving diverse roles in facilitating learning, research, and knowledge dissemination. They offer a wide array of resources, from books to digital databases, catering to the needs of students, researchers, and educators (Anuradha, 2020). Libraries promote literacy through reading materials and awareness programs, empowering individuals, and communities. Academic libraries act as centres for research and innovation, providing scholarly resources and collaborative spaces. With the rise of digital technologies, libraries are evolving into digital hubs, aligning with NEP 2020's digital education initiatives. Additionally, libraries preserve cultural heritage and promote indigenous knowledge. In essence, libraries are vital pillars of education in India, fostering a culture of learning and ensuring equitable access to knowledge (Parmar et al., 2022). Libraries are pivotal in endorsing education policies, transcending their traditional role as knowledge custodians to become vibrant centres that foster learning, research, and development. They actively contribute to shaping education policies, going beyond resource provision to influence policy formulation and implementation, thus impacting the entire educational ecosystem.

Libraries play an indispensable role in achieving the objectives of NEP by serving as vital repositories of knowledge and hubs for intellectual discourse. They facilitate learning, research, and information dissemination, fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence. In the NEP context, libraries are envisioned as dynamic spaces promoting digital literacy, research culture, and lifelong learning, not just repositories of books. Recognizing libraries as essential components of the education ecosystem highlights their role in nurturing critical thinking skills, fostering creativity, and supporting holistic development (Bapte, 2022).

1.3 Transition to Digital Education Landscape

NEP 2020 advocates for integrating digital technologies in education to improve access, equity, and quality. This shift to a digital education landscape requires reimagining libraries as digital knowledge centres. Libraries are adapting by providing digital literacy training, access to e-resources, and virtual learning environments to align with NEP goals. They are poised to play a central role in facilitating personalized, flexible, and inclusive learning experiences in the digital age.

1.4 Objective of the Paper

The paper aims to explore and analyze the role of academic libraries in accelerating the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) in India. It highlights how digital libraries contribute to NEP's digitization agenda by providing students access to vast information and knowledge resources. By examining the significance of academic libraries in the digital landscape within NEP 2020, the paper seeks to illuminate the transformative role of technology in reshaping education delivery and promoting inclusive learning environments. Additionally, it provides insights into the strategies and initiatives undertaken by digital libraries to align with the objectives and principles outlined in NEP 2020.

2. Understanding the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020

2.1 Key Objectives and Principles of NEP 2020:

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India represents a paradigm shift in the educational landscape, aiming to revamp the education system of the country comprehensively (*Highlights of new education policy, 2020*). The NEP 2020 seeks to transform the country's learning environment more inclusive and equitable, stressing on multidisciplinary and skill oriented education, fusing between traditional and modern digital learning, regional language learning to meet the needs of the diverse socio-economic stakeholders of the nation (*National Education Policy, 2020*). Here is a brief overview of the policy:

- (i) **Guiding Pillars:** NEP 2020 is built on the principles of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability.
- (ii) **Universal Access to Education:** Universal Access to Education under NEP 2020 emphasizes on ensuring education for all by 2030, focusing on inclusive education, early childhood care, school and higher education.
- (iii) **School Education and Reduction of Dropout Rates:** NEP 2020 seeks to ensure universal access to school education for children aged 3 to 18 years by 2030. It aims to achieve this through initiatives such as the establishment of neighbourhood schools, the removal of language barriers, and the provision of free and compulsory education up to the secondary level. Implementing measures to reduce dropout rates through innovative methods.
- (iv) **Higher Education:** NEP 2020 envisions holistic and multi disciplinary education, flexibility in choosing subjects, multiple entry and exit points, and a credit-based system to facilitate seamless education.

- (v) ***Preparing Youth for Future Challenges:*** Designed to equip youth with skills for the 21st century.
- (vi) ***Equitable Education and Quality Enhancement:*** Striving for equity in education and enhancing quality through technology and innovative teaching methods.
- (vii) ***Flexible Curriculum:*** NEP 2020 advocates for a flexible curriculum framework, allowing students to choose subjects based on their interests and aptitudes.
- (viii) ***Technology Integration:*** NEP 2020 advocates integrating technology into education, including e-libraries and online courses. Improving online access to library books, expanding digital libraries, and promoting collaboration between educational institutions and libraries through various technology platforms.
- (ix) ***Promotion of Indian Languages:*** The new policy stresses the preservation and promotion of regional languages, recommending the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction.
- (x) ***Assessment Reforms:*** It proposes a shift from rote learning to competency best assessment focusing on critical thinking and conceptual clarity
- (xi) ***Regulatory Framework:*** The policy suggests establishment of a single regulatory body for higher education, called the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to replace the existing regulatory bodies
- (xii) ***Holistic Development:*** The policy emphasizes holistic development, focusing on cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical aspects of learning.
- (xiii) ***Development of Good Human Beings:*** Aims to develop individuals capable of contributing positively to society.
- (xiv) ***Multidisciplinary Education:*** NEP 2020 proposes a shift from rote learning to competency best assessment focusing on critical thinking and conceptual clarity.
- (xv) ***Enhancement of Educational Institutions and Libraries:*** Enhancing educational institutions and public libraries to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities (Nandi, 2023).

3. Role Academic Libraries in NEP 2020

Academic libraries play a crucial role in aligning with national education policies, particularly evident in the transformative framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 emphasizes holistic education, multidisciplinary learning, and technology integration. In this context, academic libraries serve as essential platforms for knowledge dissemination, preservation, and fostering critical thinking (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023). They

contribute significantly to achieving the objectives set forth in NEP 2020, thereby playing a pivotal role in supporting the country's educational goals and objectives.

3.1 School Libraries

School libraries are instrumental in cultivating reading habits and offering a diverse array of resources to students. Procuring a variety of materials, including storybooks, comics, relaxation books, moral-themed literature, and age-appropriate reading materials, enhances the effectiveness of school libraries. Storybooks ignite imagination, while comics engage visual learners (Tomar, 2022). The NEP 2020 emphasizes the integration of more libraries within the school education system to facilitate extensive reading skills and to provide a foundation for lifelong learning. Libraries are seen as essential for academic support, enabling students to explore beyond textbooks and encouraging independent learning and thinking skills (Roche et al., 2022). The declining interest in reading, attributed to widespread internet and social media usage, underscores the importance of nurturing reading habits among children. Therefore, it is imperative for library staff to actively promote a love for reading to counteract this trend.

3.2 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Libraries

College and university libraries are pivotal in advancing higher education, aligning with the objectives of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP 2020 positions these libraries as centres for fostering research, innovation, and lifelong learning among students and faculty. It emphasizes integrating digital technologies to enhance access to global knowledge resources, encouraging collaborative learning spaces, and supporting open access to scholarly information. This policy aims to transform HEI libraries into dynamic learning environments that not only support academic pursuits but also contribute to the development of critical thinking and research skills among learners. Recognized as vital hubs of knowledge and learning, they are instrumental in fostering critical thinking and research skills among students. NEP 2020 underscores the necessity to modernize these libraries to meet the diverse needs of students, researchers, and faculty. This transformation is essential due to evolving user expectations and advancements in information and communication technology (ICT) (*National education policy, 2020*). Digital transformation is imperative, involving establishment of digital libraries and repositories by digitizing collections, enhancing access and preservation, and facilitating remote access to resources. These libraries integrate technology to offer digital resources like e-books and online journals, supporting multidisciplinary learning and research. Furthermore, they serve as resource centres,

providing access to educational materials and supporting curriculum and research needs. Their role extends to facilitating access to information, supporting research and innovation, and preserving knowledge (Parmar, Prajapati, and Patel, 2022). Additionally, they promote lifelong learning and information literacy, offering diverse learning opportunities, promoting digital literacy, and developing employability skills. Overall, academic libraries play a crucial role in realizing the objectives of the NEP 2020 by adapting to digital transformation and fostering continuous learning and critical thinking among stakeholders of college and University Libraries.

4. Academic Library Services in the context of NEP 2020

The role of academic libraries in the context of national education policies, particularly the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, is crucial. Libraries are essential components in supporting the educational objectives outlined by such policies, emphasizing the transformation of libraries into vibrant learning hubs that cater to diverse needs.

Key aspects of library services include digital transformation, modernization of library spaces, and facilitating remote access and collaboration. Digital libraries offer a wide range of resources, including e-books, audio-books, and digital archives, enhancing accessibility and convenience for users. Remote access and e-learning platforms support distance learners and researchers, while virtual reference services and digital collaboration tools provide personalized assistance and facilitate collaboration (Khan, 2023).

Modernizing library spaces involves creating environments conducive to learning and research, fostering creativity and critical thinking among students. Integration of technology in libraries has revolutionized services, with systems like Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) streamlining operations and enhancing user experience.

Library personnel play a crucial role in assisting patrons, ensuring proper management of resources, and promoting literacy. Continuous professional development is essential to keep staff updated with the latest trends and technologies, fostering a culture of learning and innovation within the library.

Academic libraries serve as vital hubs supporting the objectives of NEP 2020, emphasizing digital transformation, modernization, and continuous professional development to meet the evolving needs of users and enhance the overall educational experience.

4.1. Implications for Library Services in NEP 2020

The objectives of NEP 2020 serve as vital hubs for knowledge creation, preservation and dissemination, facilitating the development of critical thinking skills of the learner and fostering a lifelong learning environment (Asif and Singh, 2022). The libraries as the creator, curator and provider of information resources have a significant role to play in this scenario. The following is an approach to depict the significance of libraries in successful implementation of NEP 2020.

i. **Promotion of Reading Culture:** NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of libraries in promoting reading habits among students. Libraries are expected to provide a wide range of reading materials, including books, journals, and digital resources, to foster a culture of reading and lifelong learning.

ii. **Integration of Latest Technology:** The policy advocates for the integration of technology in library services to enhance access to information and resources. Libraries are encouraged to adopt digital platforms, online databases, and e-books to provide students with diverse learning opportunities (Indian Era, 2020)

iii. **Support for Multidisciplinary Learning:** NEP 2020 promotes multidisciplinary education, and libraries play a crucial role in supporting this approach by offering resources across various disciplines. Libraries should curate collections that cater to the diverse interests and academic needs of students, enabling them to explore different subjects and pursue interdisciplinary studies (Amalan et al., 2023).

iv. **Professional Development of Library Professionals:** The policy emphasizes the professional development of librarians to ensure the effective management and utilization of library resources. Training programs and workshops should be organized to equip librarians with modern library management techniques, information literacy skills, and technology proficiency (Indian Era, 2020).

5. **Inclusive Access to Information:** NEP 2020 advocates for inclusive education, and libraries play a crucial role in providing equitable access to information for students from diverse backgrounds. Libraries should prioritize the acquisition of materials in multiple languages, formats, and accessibility features to cater to the needs of all learners (*National Education Policy*, 2020).

5. Challenges for the Academic Libraries in Fulfilling the Objective of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 presents promising prospects for improving library services in light of evolving information and communication technologies. However, the

progress of implementation of required initiatives seems to be very slow. The major impediments that are urgently needed to address are as follows:

- (i) **Financial Constraints:** Obtaining sufficient funding for resource acquisition, technology upgrades, and service provision.
- (ii) **Infrastructure Needs:** Ensuring the library possesses adequate physical and technological infrastructure to meet user requirements.
- (iii) **Digital Divide:** Addressing unequal access to digital resources and online learning platforms among students.
- (iv) **Changing User Demands:** Adapting to evolving user needs, including fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- (v) **Technology Integration:** Incorporating new technologies to enhance teaching, learning, and research, necessitating investments in both technology and staff training.
- (vi) **Trained Personnel:** Maintaining an adequate number of qualified personnel to manage library services effectively.
- (vii) **Internet Connectivity Issues:** Dealing with challenges such as poor internet connectivity and unreliable power supply.
- (viii) **Digital Literacy Promotion:** Addressing the lack of digital literacy skills among library users.
- (ix) **Space Limitations:** Managing limited physical space for collections and study areas, discussion rooms, and technological facilities.

To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive strategy is needed, including advocating for increased funding, implementing innovative technologies, and providing training to enhance digital literacy among library staff and users. Additionally, library personnel should possess a diverse skill set, including IT, managerial, and technical competencies, to deliver efficient and user-responsive services.

6. Conclusion

Academic libraries play a crucial role in National Education Policy 2020 of India, acting as dynamic centres that align with its goals. They go beyond being mere repositories of knowledge by integrating technology, fostering collaborative learning environments, promoting research and innovation, and nurturing reading and literacy. Academic libraries contribute significantly to shaping education policy by actively engaging in research, facilitating lifelong learning, and collaborating with stakeholders to advance educational objectives. As indispensable partners in policy development and execution, they have a

profound impact on societal progress. To excel in their roles, library professionals must exhibit flexibility, openness to new ideas, and a caring approach to users' needs. The paper underscores the significant role of academic libraries as indispensable partners in the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India. By serving as multifunctional hubs within the digital landscape, these libraries actively contribute to reshaping education delivery, promoting inclusive learning environments, and advancing the objectives of NEP 2020. Through their provision of vast information and knowledge resources via digital libraries, they facilitate access to education and foster lifelong learning among students. The transformative role of technology in this context highlights the crucial importance of academic libraries in navigating the educational landscape of digital India.

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