

Translating NEP 2020 Vision into Classroom Practice: Challenges and Opportunities in Indian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a paradigm shift in Indian higher education, aiming to transition the pedagogical continuum from rote learning toward holistic, interdisciplinary, and student-centric inquiry. While the policy framework outlines ambitious macro-level goals—such as the Multiple Entry and Exit Scheme (MEES), Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), flexible curricula, and experiential learning—its ultimate success hinges on effective micro-level execution within individual classrooms. This paper examines the practical realities, systemic challenges, and structural opportunities associated with translating the vision of NEP 2020 into day-to-day instructional practices across Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It further provides actionable frameworks for institutional leadership and faculty members to bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom outcomes.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Higher Education, Pedagogy, Multidisciplinary Learning, Experiential Learning, Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), Faculty Development.

1. Introduction

India's higher education system is currently undergoing one of the largest structural transformations in its history. For decades, Indian higher education was characterized by rigid disciplinary silos, examination-centric teaching methods, and a disconnect between academic training and contemporary societal/industrial demands. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) was introduced to disrupt these legacy patterns by championing access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability.

However, a fundamental gap persists between policy articulation and pedagogical execution. While central authorities and university senates enact structural reforms (e.g., credit frameworks, four-year undergraduate degrees), the daily dynamic within the classroom remains the definitive arena where educational transformation occurs. Transforming a curriculum on paper does not automatically alter faculty instruction, assessment paradigms, or student engagement patterns.

2. Theoretical Framework: Pedagogical Shift Under NEP 2020

The conceptual foundation of NEP 2020 rests on shifting classroom dynamics from teacher-centered transmissive models to learner-centered constructivist paradigms.

Traditional Paradigm	Shift	NEP 2020 Paradigm
• Rote memorization & Summative evaluation	→	• Formative & Competency-based assessment
• Single-discipline silos	→	• Multidisciplinary & Flexible learning
• Passive lecture consumption	→	• Active, Experiential Learning
• Standardized one-size-fits-all model	→	• Personalized credit trajectories

Key Pedagogical Vectors:

1. Multidisciplinarity: De-siloing humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and vocational streams.
2. Experiential Learning: Integrating hands-on projects, field studies, and industry internships into core coursework.
3. Assessment Reform: Transitioning from end-of-term high-stakes exams to continuous formative evaluation focused on critical thinking and problem-solving.
4. Digital & Vernacular Integration: Utilizing educational technology (blended learning) and encouraging instruction in regional languages to broaden accessibility.

3. Opportunities in Classroom Translation

The implementation of NEP 2020 offers unprecedented opportunities to modernize higher education instruction across India:

A. Curricular Personalization & Interdisciplinary Problem-Solving

With the introduction of the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), instructors can design modules that cross disciplinary boundaries. For example, a course on Environmental Sustainability can jointly integrate concepts from Data Science (modelling climate trends), Public Policy (legislation), and Humanities (community impact).

B. Integration of Authentic Assessment Models

NEP 2020 provides a mandate to move beyond memory recall tests. Instructors can incorporate project-based rubrics, peer evaluations, case-study analyses, and portfolio assessments.

C. Blended & Technology-Enhanced Learning

By combining in-person classroom engagement with digital platforms (e.g., SWAYAM, NPTEL, virtual labs), faculty can adopt "flipped classroom" strategies. Class hours can be dedicated to debate, problem-solving, and collaborative activities rather than basic information delivery.

4. Key Implementation Challenges in HEIs

Despite the policy's forward-looking framework, several structural and cultural operational barriers impede classroom-level adoption:

Challenge Category	Description & Impact on Classroom Practice
Faculty Readiness & Capacity	Many faculty members lack formal training in modern pedagogical techniques, active learning strategies, and outcome-based curriculum design.
Infrastructure Disparities	Significant resource gaps exist between premier central institutions and state/affiliated colleges regarding digital tools, laboratories, and classroom spaces.
High Student-Teacher Ratios	Large class sizes in many public HEIs make personalized mentoring, formative feedback, and continuous evaluation challenging to maintain.
Institutional Inertia & Administrative Friction	Bureaucratic delays in updating syllabi, managing dynamic credit transfers, and coordinating multidisciplinary courses often disincentivize faculty innovation.

Assessment Redesign Resistance	Transitioning from traditional standardized tests to competency-based assessments demands substantial continuous effort from educators, leading to symbolic rather than substantive compliance.
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5. Strategic Recommendations for Actionable Translation

To successfully bridge the gap between policy objectives and classroom reality, HEIs should focus on four core institutional mechanisms:

Institutional Action Plan

1. Establish Continuous Faculty Development Centers (FDCs): Shift from static, one-time workshops to ongoing pedagogical mentoring programs focused on instructional design, educational technology integration, and rubrics formulation.
2. Redesign Syllabi around Learning Outcomes: Reframe course learning outcomes (CLOs) using Bloom's Taxonomy, prioritizing higher-order cognitive skills (Analysis, Evaluation, Creation) over lower-order recall (
3. Teaching Innovation: Institutional performance appraisals and promotion criteria should recognize active learning research, interdisciplinary course creation, and pedagogical experimentation alongside standard research publications.
4. Micro-Credentialing & Modular Course Offerings: Structure courses into self-contained units to accommodate students utilizing Multiple Entry/Exit options without disrupting overall learning continuity.

5.1 Institutional Autonomy and Research Incentivization in Faculty Governance

Paragraph 13.6 of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 directly aligns institutional autonomy with academic rigor by reimagining faculty recruitment, retention, and career

progression. By granting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) the authority to establish independent and transparent recruitment processes, the policy seeks to minimize administrative delays and eliminate arbitrary hiring practices, thereby attracting top-tier scholarly talent. Crucially, the introduction of a structured probation framework akin to a "tenure-track" system institutes an accountability mechanism that ensures long-term teaching and research excellence before securing permanent faculty appointments. Recent systematic evaluations of higher education reforms emphasize that capacity building, institutional autonomy, and strategic faculty governance are foundational to driving sustainable skill development and academic excellence across Indian HEIs (Narkhede et al., 2025). To sustain a vibrant research culture, this framework balances rigorous entry standards with a meritocratic, fast-track promotion system designed to reward high-impact research and exceptional contributions. This dual approach transforms faculty career trajectories from time-bound administrative steps into dynamic, performance-driven pathways that motivate scholars to engage in cutting-edge research, driving institutional excellence and raising Indian HEIs to global benchmarks.

Conclusion

Translating the ambitious vision of NEP 2020 into everyday classroom practice requires moving past institutional compliance toward deep pedagogical transformation. While systemic challenges—such as faculty capacity gaps, infrastructural constraints, and large class sizes—persist, the policy framework provides a clear mandate to create inclusive, interdisciplinary, and critical-thinking-driven learning environments. Sustained investments in faculty development, institutional flexibility, and learner-centered pedagogical methods will remain essential to fulfilling the promise of NEP 2020 for Indian higher education.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of all the authors, declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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