

NEP 2020 and Changing Undergraduate Experiences: A Sociological Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to transform Indian higher education through multidisciplinary learning, flexible curricula, skill development, internships, credit mobility, and multiple entry and exit pathways. This article examines the changing undergraduate experience under NEP 2020 from a sociological perspective, focusing on emerging opportunities and challenges. The study is based on secondary data from NEP 2020, UGC documents, peer-reviewed research, and published empirical studies. The findings indicate that NEP 2020 provides greater academic choice, interdisciplinary learning, skill development, and educational mobility. However, challenges related to curriculum workload, digital systems, student awareness, infrastructure, funding, faculty preparedness, and uneven implementation persist. Sociologically, students' ability to benefit from these reforms may differ due to inequalities in economic resources, cultural capital, digital access, and social support. The article argues that the effectiveness of NEP 2020 depends not only on policy implementation but also on equitable access, supportive teaching, meaningful academic choice, and improved preparation for employment and social life.

Keywords: NEP 2020; Undergraduate Students; Higher Education; Student Experience; Sociological Analysis

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 is one of the most ambitious reforms of India's education system in recent

decades. In higher education, it proposes a shift away from rigid disciplinary structures towards a more broader,

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flexible and multidisciplinary model. The policy envisages undergraduate programmes in which students can combine areas of interest, take advantage of electives and internships, develop vocational and professional skills and, under specified conditions, enter or leave programmes at different stages. It also proposes an Academic Bank of Credits to support the accumulation and transfer of academic credits. The four-year multidisciplinary bachelor's programme is described as the preferred undergraduate pathway, although three-year degrees and multiple exit options remain part of the framework (Ministry of Education, 2020).

For undergraduate students, these provisions represent a substantial change in the organisation of academic life. In the conventional model, students generally enter a programme with a relatively fixed combination of subjects and follow a predetermined progression. NEP 2020 seeks to give students greater scope to choose courses and develop combinations across disciplines. The UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes explicitly describes the new system as student-centric, flexible and multidisciplinary, with multiple entry and exit options intended to help students pursue fields of interest (UGC, 2022).

The policy also changes the expected relationship between classroom learning and the world outside the institution. Internships, vocational education, research exposure, communication skills and practical learning are intended to become

more visible parts of undergraduate education. In principle, this can make education more relevant to students' aspirations and to changing employment conditions. At the same time, these reforms create new responsibilities for colleges and universities. An institution must have sufficient teachers, classrooms, laboratories, digital infrastructure, counselling and academic-advising arrangements if students are to make meaningful use of increased flexibility. The Ministry of Education lists Academic Bank of Credits and Multiple Entry-Exit among the major higher-education initiatives associated with NEP implementation.

The question of student experience is therefore central. A policy can provide formal choice without ensuring that every student has the information, resources or institutional support needed to use that choice. This issue is especially relevant in India because undergraduate students come from very different social and economic backgrounds. Family income, rural or urban location, language, digital access, previous educational opportunities and social networks can influence the ways in which students respond to a new academic structure. From a sociological perspective, the same reform may therefore produce different experiences for different groups.

Recent research supports this more balanced view. Kulal et al. (2024), studying students, teachers and experts, found that stakeholders recognised the

promise of NEP while also identifying implementation concerns; students viewed multiple entry-exit and new credit systems positively, whereas teachers emphasised the need for capacity building. A study of 200 bachelor-degree students in Mangaluru reported a generally positive perception of NEP 2020 but also identified difficulties related to the digital UUCMS process and increased academic requirements (Praveen, 2023). Another student study reported concerns about syllabus burden, infrastructure, transportation and rural-urban disparities (Arun et al., 2022).

This article examines these developments as a sociological issue rather than as a purely administrative reform. The focus is on four dimensions of undergraduate experience: academic choice and flexibility; multidisciplinary and skill-oriented learning; teaching and assessment; and equity, employability and institutional support. The article is based entirely on secondary data and does not claim to measure the experiences of students in any one college. Instead, it brings together policy provisions and published evidence to understand the opportunities and challenges emerging during the transition to NEP 2020.

Review of Literature

The following review follows the requested format. Each study is discussed in sentences covering the author and year, title, objectives, hypothesis or guiding proposition, methodology, findings and

limitations. Where a study is conceptual or policy-oriented and does not test a statistical hypothesis, its guiding proposition is stated instead of assigning an artificial hypothesis.

Arun, Malik and Shelar (2022), in “Perceived Challenges of National Education Policy, 2020 by the Students,” aimed to examine college students’ perceptions of the difficulties associated with NEP 2020. The guiding proposition was that, although the policy offers opportunities for creativity and skill development, students may face practical challenges during implementation. The researchers collected primary data from 120 respondents and examined concerns such as syllabus burden, infrastructure, transportation, language and rural-urban disparities. They reported that 37.50% of respondents agreed that syllabus overburden was a challenge, while 53.33% agreed with the statement concerning universal access to education. The study is useful because it brings student concerns into the discussion at an early stage of implementation. Its limitations include the relatively small sample and the fact that the study does not represent undergraduate students across India.

Praveen (2023), in “National Educational Policy 2020—Students Perspective: A Study with Reference to Bachelor Degree Students of Mangalore City,” aimed to understand bachelor-degree students’ views about NEP 2020 and to identify the benefits and difficulties

associated with the Unified University and College Management System (UUCMS). The study used a questionnaire with 200 bachelor-degree students in and around Mangaluru and combined primary and secondary sources. The findings showed a generally favourable perception: 60% of respondents rated NEP as good and 15% as very good, while students also reported difficulties with UUCMS and concerns about increased academic content. The study found an association between age and perceived benefits. Its limitation is the restriction to Mangaluru and the use of a single local sample, which limits generalisation. It is nevertheless directly relevant to the present study because it places undergraduate students at the centre of the analysis.

Kulal et al. (2024), in “Evaluating the Promise and Pitfalls of India’s National Education Policy 2020: Insights from the Perspectives of Students, Teachers, and Experts,” aimed to compare the perceptions of different stakeholders concerning the promises and problems of NEP 2020. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design and included students, teachers and subject experts from different backgrounds. The guiding proposition was that the policy would be viewed differently depending on stakeholders’ roles and experience. The findings showed that experts were particularly positive about the policy’s broad vision, students appreciated multiple entry-exit options and credit systems, while teachers expressed a need

for further capacity building to deliver the range of subjects and skills envisaged. The limitation is that the study cannot represent all Indian institutions because its sample and implementation context are necessarily selective. Its major contribution is the comparison of student and teacher perspectives within one research design.

Sanmathi and Shekhar (2024), in “Perspectives of Teaching Faculty Towards the Implementation of NEP 2020 in Karnataka—An Opinion Survey from the College Teachers of Karnataka,” aimed to understand teachers’ knowledge of NEP, their preparedness to meet student needs and their views on the multidisciplinary curriculum and employability. The guiding proposition was that faculty readiness would influence how successfully students experience the new curriculum. The authors used an opinion-survey approach among college teachers in Karnataka. Their discussion indicates that teachers see potential in the new system but also face the need to adapt to multidisciplinary teaching and changing student requirements. The study is limited because it examines faculty perceptions rather than collecting direct evidence from students. Nevertheless, it is important for understanding the classroom conditions that shape student experience, especially in Karnataka, where higher-education implementation began early.

Nagamani et al. (2024), in “Challenges Faced by Higher Educational Institutions in Implementing NEP 2020,” aimed to

identify institutional barriers to implementation and the factors influencing successful execution. The guiding proposition was that institutional preparedness, funding and infrastructure would affect the quality of implementation. The study used data from 82 respondents and applied chi-square and regression analyses. It identified insufficient digital infrastructure, funding limitations and lack of awareness as significant obstacles and stressed the need for institutional capacity building. The study's limitation is its relatively small sample and institutional focus. It does not directly measure undergraduate learning outcomes, but its findings are important because institutional weaknesses ultimately affect students' access to courses, technology and support.

Dangi, Malik and Shelar (2022) provide a useful early student-level account of the challenges associated with NEP 2020. Their objective was to identify students' perceptions of practical problems rather than simply measure awareness of the policy. The study used a structured survey and focused on syllabus burden, infrastructure, transport, regional language and rural-urban disparities. The guiding proposition was that policy benefits could be constrained by unequal institutional resources. Their findings support this concern, with respondents identifying syllabus load and access issues among the challenges. The principal limitation is the small and context-specific sample, and the study was conducted at an early stage

when implementation experience was still developing.

The University Grants Commission's (2021) "Guidelines for Multiple Entry and Exit in Academic Programmes offered in Higher Education Institutions" does not test a research hypothesis. Its objective is to establish a framework through which students can enter and leave academic programmes at defined stages and retain recognised academic credits. The document is policy-oriented and uses the NEP 2020 framework as its basis. It explains multiple entry and exit as a means of removing rigid boundaries and supporting student mobility through credit recognition, accumulation, transfer and redemption. The guideline's limitation is that it describes the intended mechanism rather than documenting students' actual experiences after implementation. It is nevertheless essential for understanding the institutional opportunity structure within which undergraduate students now make academic decisions.

The UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes is designed to translate NEP 2020's principles into an undergraduate curriculum structure. Its objective is to provide a student-centric framework based on flexible choice, multidisciplinary learning and multiple entry and exit. The guiding proposition is that a more flexible credit structure can help students pursue areas of interest and construct more appropriate career pathways. The framework establishes the policy basis for

major, minor and elective learning and a broader conception of undergraduate education. As a policy framework, it does not have a conventional methodology or empirical hypothesis. Its limitation is therefore clear: formal curricular flexibility does not itself demonstrate that students can use the options effectively. The document is valuable because it defines the intended student experience against which implementation can be assessed.

The National Education Policy 2020 is the foundational policy document for this article. Its objective is to reform the entire education system, including higher education, around access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability. In higher education, its guiding proposition is that multidisciplinary, broader and flexible education can better prepare students for the 21st century. The policy proposes flexible curricular structures, multiple entry and exit, the Academic Bank of Credits, internships and stronger links between disciplines and practical learning. It is a policy document rather than an empirical study and therefore does not test a hypothesis. Its limitation for this research is that it expresses intended outcomes rather than observed student experiences.

Gokarnkar (2026), in “Navigating the Transition: Assessing Undergraduate Students' Perspectives on NEP 2020,” focuses directly on undergraduate students in autonomous and non-autonomous colleges under the University of Mumbai.

The study aims to understand awareness of the Academic Bank of Credits, Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit, interdisciplinary learning and students' views concerning the fourth year of undergraduate study. The guiding proposition is that students' willingness to use new NEP pathways depends partly on awareness, satisfaction and practical considerations such as time, cost and career goals. The study uses primary student data and examines these issues in the Mumbai context. It is particularly useful for the present review because it moves beyond policy discussion to student experience. Its limitation is that the findings are institutionally and geographically specific and should not be generalised to all Indian undergraduates.

Research Gap

The existing research leaves four important gaps. First, many studies are concerned with policy awareness, implementation or stakeholder opinion, while fewer studies synthesise how the reforms alter the everyday undergraduate experience across curriculum, teaching, assessment, skills and academic mobility. Second, available student studies are often limited to one city, university or sample, making it difficult to understand the broader Indian pattern. Third, much of the literature treats “choice” as an unqualified benefit. From a sociological perspective, however, choice is meaningful only when students possess the information, time, money, digital access and social support

needed to use it. Fourth, there is limited evidence on how multiple entry-exit, ABC, interdisciplinary learning and skill courses interact with existing inequalities between rural and urban students and between institutions with different levels of resources. The present secondary-data study addresses these gaps by bringing together policy documents and published empirical evidence and interpreting them through sociological theories of human capital, cultural capital, student agency and social reproduction.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the major changes introduced by NEP 2020 in the academic experiences of undergraduate students.
- To analyse the opportunities created by multidisciplinary education, academic flexibility, Academic Bank of Credits and multiple entry and exit.
- To examine the major challenges affecting undergraduate students during the implementation of NEP 2020.
- To assess the implications of NEP 2020 for educational equity, skill development, employability and student support.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative design based entirely on secondary data. No primary survey, interview, observation or experiment was conducted. The main sources are the National Education Policy

2020, UGC policy and curriculum documents, government materials and peer-reviewed or scholarly studies concerning students, teachers and institutions. Published empirical studies were included when they directly addressed NEP 2020, undergraduate students or the institutional conditions that shape undergraduate experience.

The literature was identified using combinations of terms such as “NEP 2020,” “undergraduate students,” “higher education,” “student experience,” “multidisciplinary education,” “Academic Bank of Credits,” “multiple entry and exit,” “student perception,” “Karnataka” and “implementation challenges.” The selected material was compared and grouped under four themes: academic choice and flexibility; multidisciplinary and skill-oriented learning; implementation challenges; and equity, employability and student support. Findings from individual studies are reported as findings of those studies and are not converted into a new national estimate.

The study has several limitations. NEP implementation varies across states and institutions, and the published evidence is still developing. Many empirical studies are cross-sectional and use local samples. The study therefore cannot establish causal effects or claim to represent all undergraduate students in India. Its value lies in bringing together available evidence and interpreting the emerging pattern from a sociological standpoint.

Interpretation and Sociological Analysis

Table 1: Major NEP 2020 Provisions and Undergraduate Student Experience

NEP provision	Opportunity for students	Likely challenge	Sociological implication
Multidisciplinary curriculum	Broader subject choice and wider knowledge.	Limited electives or timetable conflicts.	Choice may vary with institutional resources.
Academic Bank of Credits	Credit accumulation and mobility.	Awareness and administrative/technical difficulties.	Mobility depends on institutional coordination.
Multiple Entry and Exit	Flexibility for students facing interruption or changing goals.	Uncertainty about re-entry and career value of exit credentials.	Formal flexibility may not be equally usable.
Skill and vocational courses	Practical learning and employability.	Quality and availability of meaningful courses/internships.	Students need equal access to opportunities.
Continuous and varied assessment	More opportunities to demonstrate learning.	Higher workload and need for faculty preparation.	Students with unequal support may experience assessment differently.
Digital learning/UUCMS	Convenience and access to academic services.	Digital divide and technical problems.	Technology can reduce or reproduce inequality.

Table 1 summarizes the major provisions of NEP 2020 and their implications for the undergraduate student experience. The table shows that multidisciplinary education, Academic Bank of Credits, multiple entry and exit, skill-based learning, continuous assessment, and digital learning have created new opportunities for students. These provisions can provide greater

academic choice, flexibility, practical exposure, mobility, and better preparation for employment. At the same time, students may face challenges such as limited course availability, technical difficulties, increased workload, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of awareness. From a sociological perspective, the benefits of NEP 2020 may not be experienced equally by all

students because their social, economic, digital, and educational backgrounds are different. Students with better resources and guidance may be in a stronger position to make effective use of the available choices. The table also highlights the importance of institutional support, faculty preparedness, academic counselling, and digital infrastructure in making the policy successful. Thus, formal flexibility alone does not guarantee equal educational opportunities for every student. Overall, NEP 2020 has the potential to make undergraduate education more flexible, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented, but its success depends largely on equitable implementation and meaningful support for students

Human Capital Theory views education as an investment in knowledge, skills and capabilities that can improve future opportunities. This perspective is relevant to NEP 2020 because the policy connects undergraduate education with communication, critical thinking, vocational knowledge, internships, research and employability. The changing undergraduate experience can therefore be understood as an attempt to make education more useful for both social and economic life. Multidisciplinary learning may help students develop a wider range of capabilities instead of limiting them to one narrow subject. Internships and practical learning can add experience to formal qualifications. The policy's emphasis on skill development also reflects the expectation that graduates

should be able to adapt to changing labour-market conditions (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, Human Capital Theory also draws attention to quality. A skill course has limited value if it is offered only to satisfy a curriculum requirement and does not provide meaningful practice. Similarly, an internship can improve employability only when students receive genuine exposure and guidance. The opportunity to develop human capital is therefore connected to institutional resources. Students in well-resourced colleges may have access to more electives, laboratories, internships and digital tools than students in poorly resourced institutions. The theory helps explain why NEP's promise should be evaluated in terms of actual capabilities gained by students, not simply the formal introduction of new courses. From this perspective, the success of NEP 2020 depends on whether students leave undergraduate education with stronger knowledge, practical competence, communication skills and confidence to participate in employment and society.

The second objective concerns academic choice, flexibility, ABC and multiple entry and exit. A student-agency perspective treats students as active participants in education rather than passive recipients of a fixed curriculum. NEP 2020 gives formal importance to this agency by allowing students to select electives and multidisciplinary combinations and by creating mechanisms for credit accumulation and mobility. The

UGC framework describes the new undergraduate structure as student-centric and designed to help students pursue areas of interest (UGC, 2022). The Academic Bank of Credits and multiple entry-exit guidelines similarly aim to reduce rigid boundaries and enable mobility (UGC, 2021). Yet agency requires more than formal choice. Students need information, academic counselling and a realistic understanding of the consequences of their choices. They also need the economic capacity to remain in education if they choose a longer programme. A student from a financially constrained family may value the flexibility of the four-year degree but may also feel pressure to complete a degree quickly and enter employment. Likewise, an elective may appear attractive but may not be available because of timetable or faculty limitations. Gokarnkar's recent study of undergraduate students shows why awareness of ABC, multiple entry-exit and interdisciplinary options is important when examining the transition (Gokarnkar, 2026). Student agency is therefore both an opportunity and a social process. NEP can widen formal choice, but institutions must provide mentoring and clear information if students are to use that choice effectively. The sociological value of this perspective is that it recognises students as decision-makers while also recognising the constraints within which those decisions are made.

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and social reproduction provide a useful

framework for examining unequal experiences under NEP. Students do not enter college with identical levels of academic confidence, language ability, digital familiarity, family guidance or knowledge about how higher education works. A curriculum based on presentations, projects, interdisciplinary choices, online platforms and continuous assessment may favour students who already possess these resources. Students who are first-generation learners or who come from less advantaged educational backgrounds may need additional support. This does not mean that NEP necessarily increases inequality. Rather, it means that the effect of the policy depends on how institutions respond to unequal starting points. Student evidence already identifies concerns about syllabus burden, infrastructure and rural-urban disparities (Arun et al., 2022), while institutional research highlights digital infrastructure and funding as implementation problems (Nagamani et al., 2024). From a social-reproduction perspective, a flexible system could reproduce inequality if students with greater cultural and economic capital are better able to identify useful courses, obtain internships, use digital systems and plan long-term academic pathways. Conversely, good mentoring, language support, digital access, financial assistance and transparent academic advising can turn flexibility into a means of widening opportunity. The theoretical lesson is straightforward: equal formal rules do not

necessarily create equal educational experiences. NEP should therefore be implemented with attention to the different resources students bring to college. A sociological analysis must ask not only what choices exist, but who is able to use them and under what conditions.

The social-ecological perspective views student experience as the result of interaction between individual, interpersonal, institutional and wider policy environments. NEP 2020 operates at each of these levels. At the individual level, students make decisions about subjects, careers and whether to continue into additional years of study. At the interpersonal level, friends, family and teachers influence the information students receive and the confidence with which they make choices. At the institutional level, colleges decide what electives, internships, counselling and digital services can actually be provided. At the broader level, state policies, funding patterns, technology and labour-market conditions influence the value of different educational pathways. This perspective is especially useful because it explains why the same policy can produce different experiences in different institutions. A college with adequate teachers and digital infrastructure may offer many different choices, while another may struggle to offer even a limited set of electives. Sanmathi and Shekhar (2024) highlight the importance of faculty readiness, while Nagamani et al.

(2024) draw attention to institutional preparedness and resources. Kulal et al. (2024) similarly show that students, teachers and experts can view different aspects of NEP differently. Employability must also be considered in this wider environment. Skill courses and internships can be valuable, but only when they are accessible and of reasonable quality. The social-ecological approach therefore supports a coordinated response: student orientation, peer support, faculty development, institutional infrastructure, career guidance and policy monitoring should work together. The main point is that student success cannot be placed entirely on the individual. It depends on the educational environment surrounding the student.

Opportunities

NEP 2020 has introduced several changes that may make undergraduate education more flexible and relevant to students. One of the most noticeable changes is the greater choice in learning. Students can select courses and subjects based on their interests, abilities and future plans. This is different from the earlier system, where students often had to follow a fixed combination of subjects.

Another useful opportunity is multidisciplinary learning. Students can learn from more than one area and develop a broader understanding of society and contemporary issues. For example, a student studying sociology may benefit from learning about

economics, technology, environmental studies or management. Such exposure can help students connect classroom knowledge with issues they see in everyday life.

The policy also gives importance to skill development, internships and practical learning. These activities can give students an opportunity to gain experience beyond the classroom and understand how their academic knowledge can be applied in real situations. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) can also make the movement of academic credits more flexible. Similarly, multiple entry and exit options may help students who are unable to continue their education without interruption because of financial, family or other responsibilities.

From a sociological point of view, these changes can give students greater choice and participation in their own education. However, such opportunities become meaningful only when students know how to use them and receive proper guidance from their institutions.

Challenges

Along with these opportunities, the implementation of NEP 2020 has also created some difficulties. Digital access and infrastructure remain important concerns. Not every student has the same access to computers, smartphones, reliable internet, libraries and other learning facilities. These differences can influence how comfortably students adjust to the new academic system.

Another concern is faculty preparedness. Teachers are expected to work with new curricula, multidisciplinary courses, digital platforms and different methods of teaching and assessment. Adequate training and institutional support are therefore necessary. Without these, even a well-designed curriculum may be difficult to implement effectively.

Students may also experience academic workload and timetable-related difficulties. In some institutions, the availability of interdisciplinary courses may be limited. Students may want to choose subjects outside their main discipline but may not always find suitable courses or convenient timings.

The Academic Bank of Credits and multiple entry and exit system are useful ideas, but students need clear information about how credits are stored, transferred and recognised. Lack of awareness or proper academic counselling can make these provisions confusing.

There is also a wider issue of social and economic inequality. Students come from different family backgrounds and do not have equal financial resources, digital facilities, educational experiences or social support. A student with better resources may find it easier to take advantage of electives, internships and digital learning than a student with limited resources.

Thus, NEP 2020 offers genuine opportunities for improving undergraduate

education, but its benefits will depend greatly on the way it is implemented. The policy can succeed only when flexibility is supported by adequate infrastructure, trained teachers, academic guidance and equal opportunities for students.

Findings and Suggestions

The secondary evidence points to a mixed but broadly constructive picture. First, NEP 2020 has increased the formal flexibility of undergraduate education. Multidisciplinary study, electives, skill courses, ABC and multiple entry-exit create possibilities that were less visible in the older rigid programme structure. Students in the Kulal et al. (2024) study viewed multiple entry-exit and credit systems relatively positively.

Second, undergraduate students appear to appreciate the broad direction of the reform, but their experience is affected by practical difficulties. Praveen's (2023) Mangaluru study reported a generally positive overall perception while also identifying difficulties with UUCMS and increased academic requirements. Arun et al. (2022) found concerns about syllabus load, infrastructure and unequal conditions. These findings suggest that positive attitudes toward NEP do not remove the need for better implementation.

Third, flexibility can become confusing if students are not properly informed. ABC, multiple entry-exit, major-minor structures and interdisciplinary courses represent new academic arrangements for

many students. The existence of a formal choice does not guarantee that students understand its consequences. Academic advising therefore becomes more important under NEP than under a fixed curriculum.

Fourth, faculty preparedness is a major condition of student experience. A multidisciplinary curriculum requires teachers who can work across changing course structures and understand the needs of students taking subjects outside their traditional discipline. Research from Karnataka identifies faculty readiness as an important implementation issue (Sanmathi & Shekhar, 2024).

Fifth, institutional resources shape the quality of implementation. Digital infrastructure, funding and administrative capacity influence whether students can use UUCMS, ABC and other technology-supported systems effectively. Nagamani et al. (2024) found insufficient digital infrastructure, funding limitations and lack of awareness among significant institutional obstacles.

Sixth, NEP's equity promise needs careful attention. Students do not have equal financial resources, digital access, language skills or family guidance. A flexible system can widen opportunity, but without support it can also widen differences in students' ability to make effective academic choices.

Finally, the literature is still relatively new and fragmented. Many studies are local or cross-sectional, and there is

limited longitudinal evidence showing whether the initial problems of transition decline over time. More research is needed on rural colleges, government colleges, first-generation learners and students from different social backgrounds.

Suggestions

- Colleges should conduct a simple orientation programme for every undergraduate student explaining NEP provisions, ABC, multiple entry-exit, electives, major/minor options and the four-year pathway.
- Academic mentors should help students choose courses in relation to their interests, academic strengths and career plans.
- Universities should ensure that multidisciplinary education is genuine and supported by sufficient faculty and a reasonable range of electives.
- ABC and digital academic systems should be demonstrated practically to students rather than explained only through circulars or websites.
- Students who face financial pressure should receive clear guidance about the academic and employment implications of different programme durations.
- Faculty-development programmes should focus on interdisciplinary teaching, project work, continuous assessment, digital learning and student mentoring.

- Internships and skill courses should be monitored for quality, and institutions should avoid treating certificates alone as evidence of employability.
- Government and institutions should address digital inequality through campus connectivity, device access and accessible learning resources.
- First-generation learners and students from disadvantaged backgrounds should receive additional academic advising and mentoring.
- Universities should collect student feedback regularly and use it to revise implementation rather than treating NEP as a one-time administrative exercise.
- Future research should use larger, multi-institutional and longitudinal studies to examine whether NEP produces measurable changes in learning, retention, skills and employment.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 is changing the structure of undergraduate education in India, but its significance lies deeper than a change in curriculum or degree duration. The policy is attempting to alter how students choose subjects, move through programmes, learn across disciplines and connect education with skills and employment. For undergraduate students, this creates genuine opportunities for greater academic choice, multidisciplinary learning, practical exposure and mobility.

At the same time, the secondary evidence makes it clear that opportunities do not automatically become experiences. Students need information and guidance to use flexibility. Teachers need preparation to work with new curricular structures. Institutions need infrastructure and administrative capacity. Most importantly, students from different social and economic backgrounds need different forms of support if the promise of equity is to be realised. The experiences reported in studies from Karnataka, Mangaluru and other settings show that students often recognise the benefits of NEP while also encountering practical difficulties.

A sociological analysis therefore moves beyond the question of whether NEP is good or bad. It asks how a major educational reform is experienced by students situated differently within society. The same policy can provide freedom to one student and uncertainty to another, depending on resources, information, family circumstances and institutional support. The central challenge for policymakers and higher education institutions is consequently to convert formal flexibility into meaningful and equitable opportunity.

The long-term success of NEP 2020 should be assessed through student outcomes and experiences: whether students understand their choices, receive supportive teaching, develop useful skills, participate in meaningful multidisciplinary learning, and feel that higher education has become more

relevant to their lives and aspirations. Continued student feedback, institutional evaluation and longitudinal research will be essential. Seen in this way, NEP 2020 should be understood not merely as a policy change but as an ongoing social transformation of the relationship between students, institutions and knowledge.

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