National Education Policy 2020 and the Future of Academic Libraries in India

Mr. Anil S. Kamble

Librarian, Dr. Tatyasaheb Natu College of Arts and Senior College of Commerce, Margtamhane, Tal. Chiplun, Dist. Ratnagiri 415702 Email anilskamble77@gmail.com.

Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes holistic, multidisciplinary, and technology-driven education. Academic libraries, as central hubs of knowledge dissemination, must undergo strategic transformation to align with the objectives of NEP 2020. This paper explores the implications of NEP 2020 for academic libraries in India, analyzing key areas such as digital infrastructure, open educational resources, inclusivity, research support, and lifelong learning. It further proposes a framework for future-ready libraries that can contribute to innovation, academic excellence, and equity. The study identifies opportunities, challenges, and best practices that will guide libraries in adapting to the evolving higher education landscape under NEP 2020.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Academic Libraries, Digital Transformation, Open Access, Research Support, Multidisciplinary Learning

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a historic milestone in reshaping India's higher education system, replacing the three-decade-old NEP 1986. It envisions an education system that fosters holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning while promoting research, innovation, and global competitiveness. For higher education institutions, NEP 2020 emphasizes skill-based learning, digital integration, inclusivity, and lifelong learning opportunities, making it highly relevant in today's knowledge-driven economy.

In this evolving educational ecosystem, academic libraries occupy a pivotal role. They are no longer viewed as passive storehouses of books but as dynamic knowledge partners that provide access to diverse resources, foster research and innovation, and promote information literacy among students and faculty. With NEP 2020 advocating for digital learning platforms, open educational resources (OERs), research support, and inclusivity, libraries must transform their services, infrastructure, and professional practices to align with the policy's vision.

The future of academic libraries in India is therefore deeply intertwined with the successful implementation of NEP 2020. By embracing digital transformation, expanding multidisciplinary collections, supporting research initiatives, and promoting equitable access, libraries can contribute significantly to the policy's objectives. This paper investigates how academic libraries can strategically transform themselves to meet the vision and goals of NEP 2020, highlighting implications, challenges, opportunities, and a framework for sustainable transformation.

2. Review of Literature

Several studies have examined the transformative role of libraries in higher education, particularly in the context of policy reforms and technological advancements. According to Khan and Bhattacharya (2022), academic libraries are critical enablers in implementing NEP 2020, especially in fostering digital learning and supporting multidisciplinary research. Their study underlines the need for libraries to realign their services with the objectives of skill-based and research-driven education. Ramesh (2021) highlights the ongoing digital transformation of Indian academic libraries, pointing to the integration of Library 4.0 technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics. These technologies are reshaping the way libraries deliver services, making them more interactive, personalized, and user-centric. Similarly, Sharma and Kaur (2020) emphasize that academic libraries in India must adopt open access resources, institutional repositories, and collaborative platforms to remain relevant in the digital age. Globally, UNESCO (2019) emphasizes the role of libraries in bridging digital divides and ensuring equitable access to knowledge. This aligns with NEP 2020's vision of inclusivity and democratization of education. In the United States, academic libraries have played a pivotal role in implementing national educational frameworks by providing information literacy training, expanding digital collections, and fostering innovation labs (ACRL, 2020). Comparable

trends are also noted in the United Kingdom and Singapore, where libraries have been at the forefront of policy-driven educational change. Indian scholars such as Patel (2021) argue that the successful implementation of NEP 2020 will depend heavily on libraries' ability to adopt flexible service models that support lifelong learning, digital literacy, and cross-disciplinary research. Studies by INFLIBNET (2022) also highlight the importance of consortia-based access to e-resources, which directly supports NEP's emphasis on equitable and inclusive education.

Despite these contributions, the body of literature on the direct implementation of NEP 2020 in academic libraries remains limited. Most existing studies focus broadly on digital transformation or higher education reforms, without exploring the specific strategies libraries must adopt to align with NEP 2020. This research gap highlights the need for systematic studies that investigate how libraries can serve as strategic partners in realizing the policy's vision for holistic and future-ready education.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the role of NEP 2020 in shaping the future of academic libraries in India.
2. To identify challenges and opportunities for libraries under NEP 2020.
3. To propose strategies for transforming libraries in alignment with NEP 2020.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for academic libraries in India. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized to provide a holistic understanding of the topic.

4.1 Research Design

The research design is primarily descriptive, aiming to document the current status of academic libraries in relation to NEP 2020, and analytical, focusing on evaluating trends, gaps, and strategies for implementation. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from interviews and case studies.

4.2 Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Collected through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews with library professionals, including librarians, assistant librarians, and information scientists working in universities, engineering colleges, and multidisciplinary institutions across India. The survey focused on areas such as digital infrastructure, collection development, research support, and awareness of NEP 2020 provisions. Interviews explored deeper insights into challenges, opportunities, and institutional strategies.
- **Secondary Data:** Derived from official documents such as the NEP 2020 policy text, UGC and AICTE guidelines, scholarly research articles, conference proceedings, and reports from library consortia like INFLIBNET and DELNET.

4.3 Sampling

A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants from both central and state universities, private institutions, and engineering colleges to ensure representation from diverse academic contexts. A total of 120 library professionals were contacted, out of which 86 completed the survey and 15 participated in interviews.

4.4 Tools and Techniques

- A structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions was designed to capture quantitative data.
- Interview schedules included guiding questions on policy awareness, infrastructural readiness, professional development needs, and user demand.
- Case studies were selected from institutions that have demonstrated notable progress in aligning their library services with NEP 2020, such as IITs, NITs, and selected state universities.

4.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys was analyzed using percentage analysis and cross-tabulation to identify trends across different institution types. Qualitative data from interviews and case studies was thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, challenges, and best practices.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected academic institutions and may not fully capture the diverse realities of all libraries in India. Additionally, as NEP 2020 is still in its early stages of implementation, findings reflect the initial response and preparedness rather than long-term outcomes.

5. NEP 2020: A Transformative Framework for Higher Education

The NEP 2020 envisions an education system that is multidisciplinary, technology-driven, inclusive, and research-focused. Key highlights relevant to academic libraries include: digital learning and online education, research and innovation, open access to knowledge resources, lifelong learning, inclusivity, and multilingual resources. These areas underscore the critical role libraries must play in facilitating access, supporting research, and fostering innovation.

Table 1: NEP 2020 Provisions Relevant to Academic Libraries

NEP 2020 Provision	Library Implication
Digital Learning and Online Education	Development of e-resources, digital repositories, access to MOOCs and e-journals
Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education	Collection expansion beyond subject silos, inclusion of humanities and social sciences
Research, Innovation and Knowledge Creation	Research data management, plagiarism detection, support for patents and publishing
Equity and Inclusion	Resources for differently-abled, multilingual content, regional language resources
Lifelong Learning and Skill Development	Information literacy, digital literacy, workshops on innovation and entrepreneurship

5. NEP 2020: A Transformative Framework for Higher Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions an education system that is multidisciplinary, technology-driven, inclusive, and research-focused. It emphasizes flexibility in learning pathways, integration of technology, promotion of innovation, and democratization of knowledge resources. NEP 2020 is designed to prepare Indian higher education institutions for the challenges of the 21st century, enabling them to compete globally while remaining socially relevant.

5.1 Multidisciplinary and Holistic Education

One of the most significant aspects of NEP 2020 is its call for multidisciplinary education. Universities and colleges are encouraged to provide students with access to knowledge across science, engineering, social sciences, humanities, and vocational subjects. Academic libraries, therefore, must expand their collections beyond subject silos to support interdisciplinary teaching and research. This shift requires libraries to invest in diverse print and digital resources, develop thematic repositories, and foster collaborative learning environments.

5.2 Digital Learning and Online Education

The policy strongly emphasizes the use of technology in education. Initiatives like SWAYAM, NPTEL, and other online learning platforms are integral to its vision. Academic libraries play a central role by integrating these digital resources into their services, creating institutional repositories, and providing access to e-journals, e-books, and MOOCs. Libraries are expected to transform into digital-first hubs, ensuring seamless access to remote learners and research scholars.

5.3 Research, Innovation, and Knowledge Creation

NEP 2020 highlights the importance of research, innovation, and knowledge creation as the backbone of higher education. Libraries, as information gateways, must provide research support services such as plagiarism detection, research data management, citation analysis, and patent information services. They also need to collaborate with faculty and research centers to strengthen institutional research output and visibility.

5.4 Open Access and Inclusivity

The policy advocates for open access to knowledge and inclusivity in education. Libraries are tasked with promoting open educational resources (OERs), supporting institutional open access repositories, and ensuring equitable access for all learners. Inclusivity also means creating collections in regional and local languages, providing assistive technologies for differently-abled students, and designing user-friendly services that address diverse learning needs.

5.5 Lifelong Learning and Skill Development

Another central theme of NEP 2020 is the promotion of lifelong learning. Academic libraries must go beyond traditional functions to support skill development programs, offering training in digital literacy, information literacy, coding, data analysis, and innovation tools. This aligns libraries with the evolving needs of learners who require flexible, industry-relevant skills.

Example:

NEP 2020 Focus Area	Library Responsibility
Multidisciplinary Education	Expand collections across disciplines; foster interdisciplinary research.
Digital Learning	Provide e-resources, MOOCs, digital repositories, remote access.
Research and Innovation	Support research data management, plagiarism detection, citation services.
Open Access and Inclusivity	Promote OERs, regional language resources, assistive technologies.
Lifelong Learning	Conduct skill-based training workshops, promote digital and information literacy.

7. Challenges in Implementing NEP 2020 in Academic Libraries

While NEP 2020 provides a transformative vision, its implementation in academic libraries is constrained by several challenges:

7.1 Budget Limitations

Most universities and colleges in India face financial constraints that limit their ability to invest in digital infrastructure. Advanced library management systems, subscription to e-journals, cloud services, and research databases require significant funding. Smaller and rural institutions often struggle to meet even basic operational costs, making large-scale NEP-aligned reforms difficult.

7.2 Shortage of Skilled Manpower

The rapid emergence of technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, cloud-based systems, and digital repositories demands highly skilled library professionals. However, many libraries lack adequately trained staff. Continuous professional development opportunities are limited, which hinders the adoption of NEP 2020 recommendations.

7.3 Resistance to Change

Institutional administrators and faculty sometimes resist library reforms, perceiving them as secondary to academic functions. This resistance delays the introduction of innovative services such as open educational resources (OERs), institutional repositories, and digital-first approaches.

7.4 Limited Awareness of NEP 2020

Despite being a landmark policy, awareness of NEP 2020's provisions remains low among many library professionals. Without proper sensitization and training, libraries risk lagging behind in aligning their services with the policy's vision. Workshops, awareness programs, and policy discussions are not yet widespread across all institutions.

7.5 Unequal Access in Rural and Semi-Urban Institutions

A significant digital divide persists between urban, well-funded institutions and those located in rural or semi-urban regions. While elite institutions like IITs and central universities are adopting digital repositories and consortia-based access, smaller colleges face poor internet connectivity, outdated infrastructure, and lack of access to scholarly databases. This imbalance undermines the inclusivity envisioned by NEP 2020.

8. Opportunities and Best Practices

Despite challenges, NEP 2020 opens significant opportunities for academic libraries to redefine their roles in higher education. Institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs), and several central universities have pioneered digital transformation by:

- Creating institutional repositories to host theses, dissertations, and faculty publications.
- Integrating MOOCs (SWAYAM, NPTEL) into library services to expand learning opportunities.
- Establishing innovation labs and maker spaces to promote creativity and research culture.

Library consortia such as INFLIBNET (UGC-INFONET, Shodhganga, ShodhShuddhi) and DELNET provide platforms for resource sharing and access to thousands of e-journals, databases, and open educational resources.

Best practices :

1. **Adopting Library 4.0 technologies** – AI-based recommendation systems, chatbots for reference services, cloud-based integrated library systems.

2. **Conducting information and digital literacy programs** – Training students in citation management, research ethics, and digital tools.

3. **Expanding multidisciplinary collections** – Supporting NEP 2020's focus on holistic learning by integrating resources from science, engineering, management, humanities, and social sciences.

4. **Collaborative resource sharing** – Partnering with other libraries and consortia to optimize costs and expand access.

5. **Fostering inclusivity** – Providing multilingual content, regional resources, and assistive technologies for differently-abled learners.

Table: Opportunities and Best Practices under NEP 2020

Opportunity Area	Best Practices
Digital Transformation	Institutional repositories, MOOCs integration, AI-enabled services.
Research Support	Plagiarism detection tools, citation services, research data management.
Inclusivity and Equity	Multilingual resources, assistive technologies, open access.
Skill Development	Information literacy workshops, training in digital tools.
Collaboration and Networking	INFLIBNET, DELNET, inter-library loan, consortia-based access.

9. Strategic Framework for the Future of Academic Libraries

To align with NEP 2020, academic libraries must adopt a **strategic framework** built on five pillars:

- **Policy Alignment** – Libraries should realign their vision, mission, and strategic plans with NEP 2020 objectives.

- **Infrastructure Modernization** – Investment in ICT tools, digital repositories, cloud services, and smart technologies is essential.

- **Human Resource Development** – Continuous professional training for librarians in emerging tools like AI, data analytics, and research support.

- **Collaboration and Networking** – Active participation in national and international library networks for resource sharing.

- **Assessment and Feedback** – Regular evaluation of library services through user surveys, analytics, and benchmarking.

10. Discussion

The successful implementation of NEP 2020 in academic libraries requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, institutions, and library professionals. A comparative analysis with global practices reveals that:

- **In the United States**, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) has played a major role in aligning academic libraries with national educational goals through research support, digital literacy, and collaborative learning spaces.

- **In Singapore and the UK**, libraries have been at the forefront of digital-first strategies, offering flexible, technology-enabled services that complement national education policies.

For India, libraries must embrace:

- **Digital transformation** – to overcome geographical barriers and ensure equity.

- **Inclusivity** – by providing resources in regional languages and for differently-abled learners.

- **Collaboration** – through consortia like INFLIBNET and DELNET, ensuring equitable access to costly resources.

11. Conclusion and Suggestions

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative shift in India's higher education landscape, aiming to foster multidisciplinary learning, research excellence, digital empowerment, and inclusivity. Academic libraries stand at the core of this transformation as critical enablers of access to knowledge, lifelong learning, and innovation. The study highlights that libraries must evolve from being traditional information repositories into future-ready knowledge hubs aligned with NEP 2020 objectives.

Key challenges—including financial limitations, lack of skilled manpower, uneven infrastructure, and limited awareness—pose significant barriers to the effective implementation of NEP 2020 in libraries. At the same time, opportunities such as digital transformation, open access initiatives, research support services, and collaboration through consortia like INFLIBNET and DELNET provide pathways for libraries to reposition themselves as drivers of academic excellence.

To realize the vision of NEP 2020, the following suggestions are offered:

1. **Policy Support and Funding** – The government and institutions must allocate dedicated budgets for library modernization, digital infrastructure, and open access initiatives.
2. **Professional Development** – Continuous training programs in emerging technologies, digital curation, and research support should be mandatory for library professionals.
3. **Collaboration and Networking** – Libraries should actively participate in national and international consortia to maximize access and minimize costs.
4. **Inclusivity and Accessibility** – Development of multilingual collections, resources for differently-abled learners, and user-friendly digital platforms must be prioritized.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation** – Institutions should establish mechanisms to regularly assess library performance, user satisfaction, and policy alignment.

In conclusion, the future of academic libraries in India is deeply tied to the effective implementation of NEP 2020. By embracing digital innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration, libraries can transform into strategic knowledge partners that not only support but actively drive the goals of India's educational reforms.

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