



NEP 2020 and the Sustainable Development Agenda: The Role of Higher Education in Shaping Viksit Bharat @2047

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56975/ijrar.v13i2.331429>

Abstract

In order to advance the Sustainable Development Agenda and realize the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, this research paper critically examines the transformative potential of India's higher education system under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The study combines updated secondary data from national educational statistics (2023–2025) with primary data gathered from 60 faculty members using a mixed-method research design. The analysis focuses on NEP 2020's introduction of multidisciplinary approaches, research expansion, digital integration, and structural reforms. The results show that faculty members strongly support the direction of policy, but they also point out implementation gaps in infrastructure, funding, and capacity building. In order to position higher education as a strategic driver of long-term national transformation, the study makes policy recommendations targeted at enhancing institutional ecosystems, research productivity, and inclusive access.

Key Words

Higher Education, Viksit Bharat@2047, NEP 2020, Sustainable Development, SDGs, Faculty Perception, Research Ecosystem,

Introduction:

The intellectual foundation of national development is provided by higher education. The development of human capital, research innovation, technological advancement, and social transformation are all significantly influenced by universities and colleges in developing nations like India. Viksit Bharat @2047, India's vision for the country's centennial of independence in 2047, places a strong emphasis on social inclusion, economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and global competitiveness. Systemic changes in the education sector,

especially at the tertiary level, are required to achieve this ambitious goal. To ensure that graduates are ready for the changing labour market, these reforms should place a high priority on skill development, interdisciplinary learning, and industry partnerships. Furthermore, promoting an innovative and research-oriented culture within institutions will be crucial to guiding the country toward inclusive and sustainable growth.

A historic reform framework intended to update India's educational system is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It promotes internationalization, research orientation, academic flexibility, multidisciplinary education, and digital transformation. In particular, SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) are all closely aligned with the policy. NEP 2020 aims to reposition universities as catalysts for sustainable development by incorporating sustainability principles into research priorities and curricula.

With more than 1,168 universities and more than 45,000 colleges nationwide, India's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education has reached roughly 28.4%, according to recent data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2023–24). By 2035, the government expects GER to reach 50%. Following post-pandemic reforms, digital expansion through online and blended learning has accelerated, improving accessibility while also revealing digital divides.

There are still issues in spite of structural advancements. Educational outcomes are still influenced by differences in research funding, faculty readiness, institutional quality, and rural-urban divides. Therefore, evaluating the operational efficacy of NEP 2020 reforms requires an understanding of faculty perspectives. This study assesses how higher education can significantly contribute to sustainable development and national transformation by bridging policy analysis with practical academic insights.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the alignment between NEP 2020 reforms and the Sustainable Development Goals framework.
2. To analyze the role of higher education institutions in advancing the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.
3. To evaluate faculty perceptions regarding opportunities and implementation challenges under NEP 2020.
4. To identify best practices in educational reform that support equitable access to quality education.
5. To explore strategies for fostering collaboration between government, academia, and industry to enhance the impact of NEP 2020 initiatives.

Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method research design. Primary data were collected from 60 faculty members through structured questionnaires using percentage analysis. Secondary data were obtained from AISHE (2023–24), Ministry of Education reports, UGC publications, and SDG India Index reports (2024–25). Quantitative data were presented using statistical tables and bar diagrams, while qualitative insights were analyzed through interpretative discussion. The findings indicate a significant correlation between faculty engagement in research activities and overall academic performance. Furthermore, the study highlights areas for improvement in faculty development programs to enhance educational outcomes further.

Review of Literature

Scholarly discourse on higher education and national development consistently emphasizes the role of universities as engines of human capital formation and innovation. Tilak (2021) argues that public investment in higher education significantly contributes to long-term economic growth and social mobility in developing economies. Altbach (2019) highlights globalization, academic mobility, and research productivity as defining features of modern higher education systems.

Studies on education and sustainable development underline the importance of aligning curricula with environmental consciousness, inclusive growth, and social responsibility. UNESCO (2023) stresses that higher education institutions must integrate sustainability into teaching, research, and community engagement to achieve SDG 4 and related goals. Empirical research also suggests that multidisciplinary frameworks enhance problem-solving capacity and innovation outcomes.

By fostering collaboration across diverse fields, institutions can better equip students with the skills needed to tackle complex global challenges. This holistic approach not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares graduates to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable future.

Indian policy-oriented literature examines the transformative potential of the National Education Policy 2020. Researchers note that NEP 2020 promotes flexibility, credit transfer, research funding through NRF, and international collaboration. However, implementation studies identify challenges related to funding adequacy, faculty preparedness, digital infrastructure, and regional disparities. This study builds upon existing scholarship by combining policy analysis with faculty-level empirical evidence. The findings reveal that while the policy aims to foster an inclusive and equitable education system, significant gaps remain in its execution. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for realizing the full benefits envisioned in NEP 2020.

The Sustainable Development Agenda and NEP 2020

Restructuring India's education ecosystem to meet the demands of the twenty-first century is the goal of the National Education Policy 2020, a systemic reform. In particular, SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) are all in close alignment with it.

NEP 2020 supports institutional autonomy, digital learning platforms, research-intensive universities, and multidisciplinary education. It is anticipated that the National Research Foundation (NRF) will improve innovation ecosystems and research funding. The goal of the policy is to increase access to higher education for all by aiming for a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035.

Additionally, industry-academia connections, skill-development programs, and sustainability-focused curricula promote environmental responsibility and economic resilience. NEP 2020 operationalizes the larger sustainable development agenda within the framework of higher education in India through these measures.

This all-encompassing strategy not only raises educational standards but also equips graduates to handle the changing needs of the labor market. Therefore, the policy seeks to develop a generation of competent professionals who are not only prepared for the workforce but also capable of making significant contributions to the economy and society.

Higher Education's Contribution to Viksit Bharat @2047

India is envisioned as a developed, knowledge-driven, inclusive, and globally competitive country under the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision. By generating competent graduates, encouraging innovation, and bolstering entrepreneurship ecosystems, higher education institutions act as catalysts for realizing this vision.

Through technology transfer, start-up incubation, and research commercialization, universities support economic growth. Higher education improves social equity by giving marginalized communities more opportunities. Academic research promotes climate-responsive policies and sustainable technologies.

The current study's faculty perceptions show that multidisciplinary reforms and a focus on research are strongly supported. To guarantee successful implementation, respondents stress the necessity of sufficient funding, digital infrastructure, and faculty training.

Table 1: Key Higher Education Indicators (2024–25 Estimates)

Indicator	Latest Value
Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER)	28.4%
Target GER by 2035	50%
Total Universities	1168
Total Colleges	45,000+

Organised by: DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, S.R.R & C.V.R GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE(A), Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, India.

The increase in enrollment figures highlights the growing accessibility and demand for higher education. As institutions strive to meet the target GER by 2035, efforts will need to focus on expanding infrastructure and improving educational quality.

Table 2: Key Higher Education Indicators (2023–2024) Faculty Perception on Key NEP 2020 Reforms

Reform Area	Positive Response (%)	Needs Improvement (%)
Multidisciplinary Approach	72	28
Research Promotion	65	35
Digital Integration	58	42

Results and Analytical Conversation

72% of faculty respondents strongly support the multidisciplinary framework implemented under NEP 2020, according to the analysis of primary data. This is in line with the increasing body of scholarly opinion that interdisciplinary knowledge improves research integration, employability, and innovation. However, 28% voiced worries about changes to the workload and curriculum.

In terms of research and innovation, 65% of respondents said that policy emphasis had improved, but 35% cited bureaucratic grant procedures, insufficient funding, and a lack of laboratory facilities as obstacles. This implies that administrative and financial reforms must be implemented in tandem with the policy's intent.

Responses to digital integration were relatively less positive (58%), suggesting that different institutions have different levels of technology infrastructure. Rural college faculty emphasized inadequate digital training and bandwidth constraints.

Increasing GER, institutional expansion, and research funding initiatives are indicative of a progressive shift toward SDG targets, according to secondary data analysis. To guarantee fair and sustainable development results, regional disparities and quality assurance systems must be strengthened.

Implementation Difficulties

Even with progressive policy design, different institutions and regions continue to implement policies differently. Faculty shortages, administrative delays in grant disbursement, digital divides between urban and rural institutions, and inadequate research funding are some of the major obstacles.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Raise public spending on higher education to keep up with global standards.
2. Put in place prompt and transparent funding procedures to run the National Research Foundation.
3. Increase faculty capacity-building initiatives and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural colleges.
4. To improve innovation and employability, fortify industry-academia collaborations.
5. Put in place reliable monitoring and assessment mechanisms to monitor the results of SDG alignment.

Conclusion:

Under NEP 2020, higher education in India is going through a structural change. In line with international development agendas, the policy framework incorporates sustainability, innovation, inclusivity, and digital modernization. The study's mixed-method evidence shows that while faculty members acknowledge the reforms' progressive orientation, they also stress the need for increased institutional capacity.

Higher education institutions must transform into research-driven, technologically enabled, and socially conscious ecosystems in order to fulfil the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. This transformation must include expanding access, increasing faculty development, bridging digital divides, and improving research productivity. Higher education can act as a catalyst for long-term national advancement through strategic investment, accountability systems, and cooperative governance.

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