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TRANSFORMING ACADEMIA, EMPOWERING INDIA: THE NEP 2020 VISION

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is a key component of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which represents the most extensive reform of Indian education since 1986. The ability of India's universities and colleges to increase access, improve quality, and turn enrollment into employable, research-capable human capital is critical to the country's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047. This study looks at the extent to which NEP 2020 has advanced that objective in Indian higher education. It uses a descriptive-analytical design based on secondary data, including the policy's text, official regulatory and implementation records, and the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the years 2014–15 to 2023–24. According to the report, enrollment has increased to 4.50 crore, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has reached 30.0, and the gaps for women and students from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have shrunk. The Academic Bank of Credits, the four-year undergraduate program, international campuses, and the Anusandhan National Research Foundation are examples of structural reforms that are underway. However, GER is now growing at a rate of about 0.7 percentage points annually, compared to the roughly 1.8 percentage points needed to attain the 50% target by 2035. The study comes to the conclusion that while NEP 2020 has created the framework for change, whether or not it produces a Viksit Bharat will depend on faculty capacity, funding, regional equity, and learning results.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, nations have transitioned from a middle-income to a high-income position because of its universities. They create institutions, produce research, provide skilled labor, and promote social mobility. Depending on the quality of what occurs between the ages of 18 and 23, India's demographic advantage—which has one of the youngest populations in the world—can either be a benefit or a burden. The goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 is for India to become a developed economy by the year of its centennial of independence. Education and such an aim are inextricably linked. In addition to a research base that generates ideas rather than just graduates, a developed India requires a workforce that is technologically savvy, scientifically knowledgeable, ethically sound, and flexible. The policy tool for this change was the National Education Policy 2020, which was approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020.

The policy suggests a number of related changes for higher education. It transitions from inflexible three-year degrees to flexible four-year structures with various entry and exit points, from competency-based learning to rote assessment, from fragmented regulation to a lighter and more cohesive framework, and from limited disciplinary silos to transdisciplinary learning. Additionally, it establishes a national goal of a 50% Gross Enrollment Ratio by 2035, which is backed by changes to research funding and promotion of internationalization.

It is feasible to raise a more pointed question than whether the policy remains excellent in theory six years after it was announced. What the evidence shows regarding implementation is the question. Using official statistics and a methodical examination of the reform record, this research attempts to address it.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Higher education and national development

Since the human-capital concept of the 1960s, education has been viewed as an investment that increases productivity in economic theory. Subsequent endogenous-growth theory emphasized that long-term growth is driven by knowledge generation, making research universities strategic assets rather than just educational establishments. This implies that seat growth on its own is not enough for India. Additionally, the system needs to provide innovation, quality, and relevance.

The pre-NEP landscape

Higher education in India was widespread yet uneven before to 2020. Despite being one of the largest enrolment systems in the world, it was characterized by affiliation-based colleges with little academic autonomy, early

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specialization that pushed students into streams, poor connections between teaching and research, gender and regional disparities, and an examination culture that rewarded memory. A number of bodies with overlapping missions were in charge of regulation.

NEP 2020's main reform pillars

This article divides the NEP 2020 higher education changes into five pillars for analytical purposes:

1. Access and equity, with a focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged people and the 50% GER target.
2. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), the four-year undergraduate program, multiple entry and departure, and multidisciplinary education are examples of curricular and institutional flexibility.
3. Employability and skills, including internships, skill-based credits, and vocational integration.
4. Innovation and research, such as the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).
5. Internationalization and governance, which includes regulatory restructuring, Indian campuses overseas, and foreign campuses in India.

The data analysis and discussion are later arranged using this five-pillar framework.

Research Questions and Objectives

There are four goals for the study:

1. To track the evolution of higher education participation and access in India from 2014 to 2023.

2. To determine whether social category and gender participation discrepancies have shrunk.

3. To record the state of the significant structural changes brought about by NEP 2020.

4. To calculate the gap between present performance and the GER target for 2035 and to recommend priorities for a Viksit Bharat

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study uses a documentary methodology and a descriptive and analytical research design. Causal hypotheses are not tested.

Sources of data

Three categories of sources provide all of the secondary data used in the study.

- The Ministry of Education's All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports for 2019–20, 2021–2022, and the combined release for 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 are the statistical sources. The primary official source for enrolment, professors, and institutions is AISHE. 59,533 higher education institutions are included in the most recent edition, which has an institutional response rate of more than 90%.
- Policy and regulatory documents: the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act (2023), the UGC guidelines on credit and skill-based programs, the UGC regulations on foreign higher education institutions (2023), and the text of NEP 2020.
- Implementation reporting: official declarations and reliable news and policy summaries regarding curriculum adoption, foreign campus approvals, and ABC registrations.

Period and variables

The period of study is 2014-15 to 2023-24, which gives a pre-policy baseline and several post-policy years. The core variables are total enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio (the percentage of the 18-23 age group enrolled in higher education), Gender Parity Index (GPI), category-wise GER for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), STEM enrolment, and faculty strength.

Methods of analysis

Three techniques are used. First, **trend analysis** compares values across years and computes absolute and percentage change. Second, **gap analysis** measures the difference between the national GER and the GER of specific groups, to see whether disparity is shrinking. Third, **target-gap projection** calculates the annual increase in GER needed to meet the 2035 goal and compares it with the recent observed pace.

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Limitations of method

Three limitations should be stated openly. AISHE participation is voluntary and the data are self-reported by institutions, so errors are possible. The GER series has been revised: earlier reports gave a 2014-15 value of 24.3, while the latest series, based on 2011 population projections, gives 23.7. The paper therefore avoids mixing the two series when computing growth rates and states which series each figure belongs to. Finally, because several reforms are very recent, the analysis captures early implementation and not final outcomes.

Data Analysis and Findings

Access: enrolment and GER (RQ1)

Table 1: Enrolment and Gross Enrolment Ratio

Indicator	2014-15	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total enrolment (crore)	3.42	3.85	n/a	n/a	4.50
GER, latest revised series	23.7	n/a	n/a	29.5	30.0
GER, as originally reported	24.3	27.1	28.4	n/a	n/a

Source: AISHE reports (various years); compiled by the author. n/a = not used in this paper to avoid mixing series.

The total enrolment increased by almost 31.5%, from 3.42 crore in 2014–15 to 4.50 crore in 2023–2024. In the updated record, the GER increased by 6.3 percentage points over nine years, or around 0.7 percentage points annually, from 23.7 to 30.0. The GER increased in the previous series from 24.3 in 2014–15 to 27.1 in 2019–20, or roughly 0.56 points annually prior to NEP 2020, and then to 28.4 by 2021–2022.

Here are two observations. For the first time, the thirty percent threshold has been reached, which is a true milestone. However, the increase in involvement started long before the policy was made public, and the facts make it impossible to attribute the entire improvement to NEP 2020. The more reasonable interpretation is that the policy aimed to reroute a burgeoning system that it inherited.

Equity (RQ2)

Table 2: Participation gaps, 2014-15 and 2023-24 (GER)

Group	2014-15	2023-24	Gain (points)	Gap to national GER, 2014-15	Gap to national GER, 2023-24
National (all)	23.7	30.0	6.3	–	–
Female	22.9	31.2	8.3	0.8 below	1.2 above
Scheduled Castes	18.9	27.8	8.9	4.8	2.2
Scheduled Tribes	13.5	22.8	9.3	10.2	7.2

Source: AISHE 2023-24 as reported in official summaries; gaps calculated by the author.

The trend is positive. All underprivileged groups outperformed the national average in terms of growth. The Gender Parity Index is 1.08, indicating that women's participation is higher than men's, and female GER is now higher than the national average. The gender gap in science and technology is shrinking, as seen by the fact that women make up 2.24 crore of the 4.50 crore students and 44% of STEM enrollment, or roughly 1.02 crore.

From 4.8 to 2.2 points, the difference for Scheduled Castes has more than halved. It has decreased from 10.2 to 7.2 points for Scheduled Tribes, which is a significant improvement but remains the largest disparity in the system. Therefore, any claim of inclusive growth must be qualified: geographical variation within states, which AISHE reports independently, is likewise vast, and tribal involvement is still roughly 7 points below the national average.

STATUS OF STRUCTURAL REFORMS (RQ3)

Table 3: Classification of major NEP 2020 higher education reforms

Reform	Pillar	Evidence of status	Classification
Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and APAAR linkage	Flexibility	Reported registrations of over 3 crore students; credits stored digitally and linked to APAAR,	Operational, scaling

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		valid for at least seven years	
Four-year undergraduate programme with multiple exit	Flexibility	Adopted by many central and several state universities; UGC curriculum and credit framework issued	Operational, uneven
Skill-based credits	Employability	UGC procedure allows up to half of programme credits to be skill-based; National Credit Framework integrates academic, vocational and experiential learning	Regulated, early implementation
Foreign campuses in India	Internationalisation	UGC regulations of 2023; Southampton began classes at Gurugram in August 2025; approvals issued in June 2026 to Bristol, York and UNSW Sydney; 16 letters of intent to 15 institutions by August 2026	Operational, expanding
Anusandhan National Research Foundation	Research	Established under the ANRF Act, 2023	Institutionalised; outcomes pending
Unified regulatory restructuring	Governance	Proposed in the policy as four verticals under one umbrella	Not assessed here; status to be verified

Source: NEP 2020 text; UGC and Ministry of Education communications; secondary reporting; classification by the author.

According to the classification, the reforms that rely on digital infrastructure and regulatory notification—credit banking, credit frameworks, and foreign school approvals—are the most noticeable. Multidisciplinary teaching and research culture are examples of reforms that are longer and more difficult to validate from administrative data since they rely on academics, pedagogy, and money. Additionally, there are differences in implementation amongst institutions. Early phase reports indicated that central universities had to deal with unfilled leadership positions, financial limitations, and identity-authentication issues in ABC registration, indicating that there is actual administrative resistance to digital change.

DISTANCE FROM THE 2035 TARGET (RQ4)

By 2035, the NEP aims for a GER of 50%. The system needs to gain 20 points in 11 years, or roughly 1.8 points annually, starting with 30.0 in 2023–2024. In the updated series, the observed pace is roughly 0.7 points annually. As a result, the necessary rate is around 2.6 times the current one.

The problem is made concrete using a straightforward scale calculation. Raising GER from 30 to 50 requires enrolment to rise by nearly two-thirds, from 4.50 crore to roughly 7.5 crore, or around three crore more students, if the 18–23 age group remains mostly unchanged. Since cohort size varies with demography, this is an illustrative estimate rather than a forecast. Nevertheless, it shows the extent of the faculty, funding, and capacity increase that the aim implies.

Already, capacity is exceeded. According to AISHE, there are 17.32 lakh faculty members overall. A rough ratio of roughly 26 pupils per teacher is obtained by dividing the total enrolment by this number. Because it includes distance learning and open learning students, this number overstates the official student-teacher ratio. However, it serves as a helpful reminder that if quality is to be maintained, the faculty base must expand more quickly than enrollment.

DISCUSSION

What NEP 2020 has achieved

The lexicon and structure of Indian higher education have been successfully altered by the policy. The regulation wording now includes credit portability, various exit alternatives, skill credits, and cross-disciplinary

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choice. Additionally, ABC with APAAR provides the system with a digital record at the student level that was previously unavailable. Internationalization is now a policy priority rather than a side project, as seen by the sector's opening to foreign campuses. The creation of ANRF demonstrates a desire to increase research funding and disperse it outside of a small number of prestigious schools. Both participation and inclusivity have increased.

WHERE THE GAPS REMAIN

Quality is subordinated to quantity. Access is measured by the headline indicators. They don't tell us if pupils improve their thinking, learn more, or land a job. The NEP requires reliable, national outcome measurements because enrolment data cannot validate the program's emphasis on learning outcomes and competency-based assessment.

The binding limitation is capacity. More and better-trained instructors, labs, libraries, and digital infrastructure are needed for four-year programs, multidisciplinary offerings, and skill courses. The majority of students attend associated colleges, many of which lack this capability. On paper, a flexible curriculum may present scheduling challenges.

Ambition has not been matched by funding. The policy called for six percent of GDP to be allocated to public education. A sector that has to grow by roughly two-thirds while enhancing quality would require consistent public and well-regulated private support, regardless of the precise amount attained.

Deeper targeting is required for equity. First-generation kids, pupils in remote and ambitious districts, and tribal students are all hidden by national averages. The most obvious example is the ST gap of roughly 7 points.

The capability for research is still limited. A robust and wide research base is essential for a prosperous India. The majority of Indian students attend universities with little exposure to research. There is much work to be done in connecting ANRF funding, business partnerships, and student research to these schools.

The employability of graduates remains unproven. Internships and skill credits have good intentions, but their worth is dependent on industry involvement and the caliber of assessments. Skill credits run the risk of turning into a compliance exercise without it.

CONNECTION TO THE VISION OF VIKSIT BHARAT

The national vision can be compared to the five-pillar framework. The foundation of human capital is provided by equity and access. In an economy where technology is changing at a rapid pace, flexibility allows people to retrain throughout their lives. Education and the workforce are linked by skills. The ability to innovate creatively is created through research. The ability of Indian institutions to compete internationally while maintaining domestic accountability is determined by internationalization and governance. Progress on all five is necessary for a Viksit Bharat, not just access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the paper suggests six priorities.

1. Create a national dataset on learning outcomes. To track quality in addition to quantity, incorporate employment and outcome indicators into AISHE-style questionnaires.
2. Give faculty priority. Keep faculty development ahead of enrollment growth, fill open positions, and establish organized channels for teacher training in innovative pedagogies.
3. Make affiliated colleges stronger. To enable flexibility and multidisciplinary programs to reach the institutions where the majority of students study, provide targeted grants, shared laboratories, and digital resources.
4. Focus on isolated and tribal areas. Utilize district-level statistics to target the lowest-GER areas with scholarships, hostels, bridging courses, and instructional materials in regional languages.
5. Connect research to instruction. Make undergraduate research an obvious component of the four-year degree and open ANRF and associated programs to partnerships with state colleges and universities.
6. Control quality rather than form. Online programs, foreign campuses, and skill credits should all be closely watched for student safety and results, not just for adherence to notification regulations.

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CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay was to assess the extent to which NEP 2020 has advanced Indian higher education in the direction of a Viksit Bharat. Real benefits are evident in the data. The gaps for SC and ST students have closed, enrollment has reached 4.50 crore, GER has above 30, and women now participate at a higher rate than men. At least in terms of regulation and early practice, the reform architecture of credit banking, flexible degree formats, skill integration, international campuses, and a national research foundation is in place.

But caution is also warranted by the evidence. Prior to NEP 2020, participation growth was already underway, and the present rate is far slower than what is needed to meet the 2035 target. The metrics that are currently available evaluate access more accurately than learning, and there is still a significant gap between policy design and classroom reality. Therefore, the next phase of reform will focus more on the more difficult objectives of faculty development, funding, equity in the poorest regions, and outcome monitoring than it will on unveiling new frameworks.

Indian higher education can be a key component of the 2047 vision if these duties are undertaken with the same vigor as the original program. If they aren't, the nation runs the risk of having a contemporary framework with an unaltered educational experience.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could evaluate how the four-year curriculum and ABC are actually experienced using primary data, such as surveys of staff and students at certain universities. Comparative studies at the state level, monitoring graduate outcomes over time, and assessing the influence of ANRF on research would all provide depth that is not possible with national aggregates.

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