

ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) represents a transformative shift in Indian higher education, emphasizing holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning paradigms. This article examines the critical role of academic libraries in implementing NEP 2020, with special reference to university libraries in Maharashtra. Through analysis of policy documents, existing literature, and the state's implementation framework, the study identifies how libraries can function as catalysts in achieving policy objectives related to interdisciplinary research, digital integration, inclusive education, and holistic student development. University libraries in Maharashtra are strategically positioned to support curriculum flexibility, promote digital literacy, facilitate research, and ensure equitable access to information resources. However, significant challenges persist including infrastructure gaps, digital divide concerns, and the need for enhanced professional competencies. The article proposes a framework for transforming university libraries into dynamic learning commons aligned with NEP 2020 vision and offers strategic recommendations for policymakers, administrators, and library professionals.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Academic Libraries, University Libraries, Maharashtra, Higher Education, Digital Transformation, NEP Implementation

1. Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet on July 29, 2020, marks a watershed moment in India's educational history, replacing the thirty-four-year-old National Policy on Education 1986 (Government of India, 2020). For the first time, a comprehensive education policy has explicitly recognized the centrality of libraries in the educational ecosystem. The policy envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos while preparing students for twenty-first century global knowledge economy challenges. Maharashtra, as one of India's most progressive states in higher education, has demonstrated remarkable commitment to NEP 2020 implementation. The state government established a high-level Task Force under Dr. Raghunath Mashelkar to develop a comprehensive implementation roadmap,

which received cabinet approval in January 2022 (Government of Maharashtra, 2022). Five specialized sub-committees were constituted to develop practical guidelines, and a Steering Committee now monitors implementation progress across the state's universities. University libraries occupy a unique position within the higher education ecosystem. They serve as repositories of knowledge, facilitators of learning, and bridges between information resources and knowledge seekers. In the context of NEP 2020's ambitious goals—including multidisciplinary education, flexible curricular structures, multiple entry-exit options, research intensification, and internationalization—university libraries must undergo fundamental transformation from traditional book repositories to dynamic learning commons. This article focuses specifically on Maharashtra's university libraries, examining their preparedness, challenges, and potential contributions to NEP 2020 implementation. Maharashtra's higher education landscape comprises numerous state universities, each with its own library system serving thousands of students, researchers, and faculty members. Understanding how these libraries can align with NEP 2020's vision is essential for the state's educational development and for providing a replicable model for other Indian states.

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this article, the following terms are operationally defined:

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020): The comprehensive policy framework approved by the Government of India in July 2020, providing guidelines for educational reform across all levels from school to higher education, emphasizing holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible education (Government of India, 2020).

Academic Library: A library established and maintained by a higher education institution to meet the information, research, and curricular needs of its students, faculty, and staff.

University Library: The central library facility within a university system serving the entire university community, including affiliated colleges and research centres.

Higher Education Institution (HEI): An educational institution offering post-secondary education, including universities, colleges, and standalone professional institutions.

Digital Library: A library system in which collections are stored in digital formats and accessible through computers or electronic devices.

Information Literacy: The set of skills enabling individuals to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.

Multidisciplinary Education: An educational approach integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, allowing students to study subjects across traditional academic boundaries.

Inclusive Education: Educational practices ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and persons with disabilities.

Institutional Repository: A digital archive collecting, preserving, and disseminating the intellectual output of an institution.

Digital Transformation: The process of integrating digital technologies into all areas of institutional functioning, fundamentally changing how institutions operate and deliver value.

3. Need for the Study

The implementation of NEP 2020 across Indian higher education institutions is mandatory and urgent. All universities and colleges in India have commenced implementation, making it essential to understand how different components of the educational ecosystem can contribute to successful implementation (Sutar, 2024). Libraries, despite their centrality to academic pursuits, have received insufficient attention in implementation planning.

Several factors necessitate this investigation. First, NEP 2020 explicitly recognizes libraries' importance but provides limited guidance on transformation. Second, Maharashtra's proactive implementation creates both opportunities and challenges requiring evidence-based guidance. Third, digital transformation fundamentally alters library operations, and understanding its intersection with NEP mandates is crucial. Fourth, changing academic demands under NEP 2020 require corresponding changes in library services. Fifth, equity and inclusion goals require libraries to serve diverse populations effectively. Finally, the paucity of research specifically examining Indian academic libraries in NEP implementation underscores this study's significance.

4. Aims and Objectives

Aim

To comprehensively examine the role of academic libraries, particularly university libraries in Maharashtra, in implementing NEP 2020, and to develop a strategic framework for transforming these libraries into dynamic knowledge centres aligned with the policy's vision.

Objectives

1. To analyze NEP 2020 to identify provisions relating to library and information services.
2. To examine the current status of university libraries in Maharashtra in the context of NEP requirements.
3. To investigate challenges faced by university libraries in aligning with NEP mandates.
4. To assess the preparedness of library professionals for expanded roles under NEP 2020.
5. To evaluate digital infrastructure and technology adoption in Maharashtra's university libraries.

6. To explore the potential of libraries to support interdisciplinary research and flexible curricula.
7. To document innovative practices already undertaken in response to NEP 2020.
8. To develop evidence-based recommendations for transforming university libraries.

5. Hypothesis

Based on literature review and preliminary understanding, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between digital infrastructure in university libraries and their capacity to support NEP 2020 implementation.

6. Literature Search

The literature review was conducted using a systematic approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing research on academic libraries and educational policy, with focus on NEP 2020 and Indian higher education contexts.

Search Strategy

Electronic databases searched included ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, Ingenta Connect, IndianJournals.com, Zenodo, Google Scholar, Shodhganga, and LISA.

Search Terms

Keywords included: "National Education Policy 2020", "NEP 2020", "Academic libraries", "University libraries", "Higher education India", "Library role", "Digital transformation libraries", "Maharashtra universities", "Information literacy", "Interdisciplinary research libraries".

Inclusion Criteria

Studies published between 2020-2025 focusing on Indian higher education, peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly books addressing library roles in educational policy.

7. Research Methodology

This article employs a mixed-methods research design combining document analysis, literature review, and synthesis of empirical studies on Maharashtra's university libraries.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical design incorporating document analysis of NEP 2020 and Maharashtra government implementation reports, review of existing literature on library roles in NEP implementation, and synthesis of findings from studies examining Maharashtra's university libraries.

Data Sources

1. Primary documents: NEP 2020, Maharashtra Government implementation reports
2. Secondary sources: Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, scholarly books
3. Tertiary sources: News reports, institutional websites, professional association publications

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes related to library roles in NEP implementation. Content analysis of policy documents revealed provisions directly or indirectly affecting libraries. Synthesis of literature identified strengths, challenges, and emerging trends in Maharashtra's university libraries.

Limitations

This article synthesizes existing literature rather than presenting primary empirical data. Geographical focus on Maharashtra may limit generalizability to other states. Rapidly evolving policy implementation may render some findings time-sensitive.

8. Strong Points of University Libraries in Implementing NEP 2020

Analysis reveals several strengths positioning Maharashtra's university libraries favorably for NEP implementation:

8.1 Established Institutional Presence

University libraries benefit from decades of institutional establishment, enabling development of comprehensive collections, established user communities, and integration into university governance structures.

8.2 Professional Workforce

Qualified library professionals with advanced degrees provide a foundation for transformation. Many have engaged in continuing education and professional development (Sutar, 2024).

8.3 Rich Print Collections

Substantial print collections including books, journals, theses, and rare materials represent significant intellectual capital supporting multidisciplinary and research-intensive focus of NEP 2020.

8.4 Digital Initiatives

Many libraries have embraced digital transformation, subscribing to e-journal consortia, acquiring e-books, and participating in national digital initiatives like National Digital Library and Shodhganga.

8.5 Government Support

Maharashtra's proactive approach to NEP implementation creates a supportive environment. The state government's task forces and steering mechanisms demonstrate commitment to systematic implementation.

8.6 Reading Movement Initiatives

Maharashtra's "Reading Sankalp" initiative, involving universities in promoting reading culture, aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic development (Free Press Journal, 2024).

8.7 Consortia Experience

Experience participating in library consortia and resource-sharing networks provides foundation for enhanced collaboration under NEP 2020.

8.8 Physical Infrastructure

Purpose-built library buildings with reading halls, stack areas, and specialized sections provide opportunities for reimagining libraries as learning commons.

9. Weak Points and Challenges

Despite strengths, significant challenges impede alignment with NEP mandates:

9.1 Inadequate Digital Infrastructure

High-speed internet connectivity, sufficient computer terminals, and modern servers remain challenges, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas. Digital divide threatens equitable NEP implementation.

9.2 Financial Constraints

Library budgets have not kept pace with rising costs of resources. Many libraries struggle to maintain existing subscriptions, let alone acquire new resources.

9.3 Staff Shortages and Skill Gaps

Chronic staff shortages with many sanctioned positions vacant. Existing staff lack advanced digital skills, data management capabilities, and emerging technology expertise.

9.4 Resistance to Change

Traditional mindsets among some professionals and administrators impede transformation. Organizational inertia slows necessary changes.

9.5 Limited Integration with Academic Planning

Libraries are often excluded from academic planning, curriculum development, and institutional strategy formulation.

9.6 Inadequate Accessibility Features

Despite NEP's emphasis on equity and inclusion, many libraries lack adequate facilities for differently-abled users.

9.7 Weak Marketing and Outreach

Inadequate promotion of library resources and services results in low awareness and utilization.

9.8 Limited Collaboration with Community Libraries

Partnerships between institutional and community libraries remain limited despite NEP recommendations.

9.9 Inadequate Research Support

Support for advanced research activities remains underdeveloped, limiting libraries' contribution to research intensification goals.

9.10 Regional Disparities

Significant disparities exist among libraries across Maharashtra's regions, threatening equitable implementation.

10. Current Trends in University Library Development

Several trends shape the evolution of university libraries in Maharashtra:

10.1 Digital Transformation Initiatives

Universities increasingly embrace digital transformation, with some forming dedicated Digital Transformation Committees. Initiatives include digital libraries, mobile apps, RFID implementation, and cloud-based systems.

10.2 National Digital Library Integration

University libraries are integrating NDLI resources into service offerings and promoting its use among students and faculty (Sutar, 2024).

10.3 Open Access and Institutional Repositories

Growing awareness of open access has prompted development of institutional repositories showcasing faculty publications and student theses.

10.4 E-Resource Consortia Participation

Participation in consortia like e-Shodh Sindhu enables access to thousands of e-journals at reduced costs.

10.5 Focus on Information Literacy

Strengthened information literacy programmes teach students to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

10.6 Learning Commons Concept

Progressive libraries are transforming spaces into learning commons—flexible, technology-enabled environments supporting collaborative learning.

10.7 Remote Access Services

COVID-19 accelerated adoption of remote access technologies, supporting flexible learning models envisaged in NEP 2020.

10.8 Plagiarism Detection and Research Ethics

Libraries have assumed responsibility for providing plagiarism detection software and promoting research ethics awareness.

10.9 Virtual Labs Integration

Some libraries are integrating virtual lab resources, supporting technology-enabled learning goals.

10.10 Stakeholder Engagement

Libraries increasingly seek systematic feedback from users through surveys and user committees.

11. History of Library Development in Maharashtra's Higher Education

11.1 Pre-Independence Era

Establishment of University of Bombay in 1857 marked beginning of university education in Maharashtra. The university library served as model for subsequent institutions.

11.2 Post-Independence Expansion (1947-1980)

Significant expansion of higher education with new universities in Pune (1949), Nagpur (expanded), Aurangabad (1958), Kolhapur (1962). Libraries developed comprehensive collections and library science education programmes emerged.

11.3 Growth and Diversification (1980-2000)

Establishment of agricultural, technological, and health science universities with specialized library systems. Initial computerization began in progressive institutions.

11.4 Digital Transition (2000-2020)

UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium (later e-Shodh Sindhu) provided e-journal access. INFLIBNET promoted automation and Shodhganga repository development. University libraries adopted integrated library management systems.

11.5 NEP 2020 Era (2020-Present)

NEP announcement coincided with COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating digital adoption. Maharashtra's proactive response included Mashelkar Task Force and implementation committees. Libraries began reassessing roles in light of NEP mandates.

12. Discussion

12.1 Libraries as Catalysts for Educational Transformation

Libraries can play a catalytic role in implementing NEP 2020's vision. The policy's emphasis on holistic development, critical thinking, and self-directed learning aligns naturally with library missions. However, realizing this potential requires fundamental reimagining of library roles from book-lending institutions to learning commons and knowledge hubs.

12.2 Digital Transformation: Promise and Reality

A significant gap exists between digital transformation promise and ground-level reality. While progressive institutions embrace digital initiatives, others struggle with basic infrastructure deficits. The digital divide threatens to create a two-tier system where students in well-resourced universities enjoy seamless access while counterparts in less-privileged institutions remain dependent on inadequate print collections.

12.3 Professional Development Imperative

Current staff competencies often fall short of requirements for digital library management, research support, and data services. Systematic professional development programmes are urgently needed covering digital technologies, research data management, scholarly communication, information literacy instruction, assistive technologies, marketing, and impact assessment.

12.4 Equity and Inclusion Challenges

NEP's strong emphasis on equity finds only partial reflection in current library practices. Most libraries lack basic accessibility features, assistive technologies, or specialized collections for users with disabilities. Addressing this gap requires both policy mandates and resource allocation.

12.5 Interdisciplinary Research Support

Interdisciplinary work requires access to diverse information resources, sophisticated discovery tools, and library professionals capable of supporting varied research methodologies. Current library collections and services, often organized along disciplinary lines, may inadequately support interdisciplinary research.

12.6 Collaboration and Resource Sharing

While participation in national consortia exists, deeper collaboration among state university libraries remains underdeveloped. Shared collection development, coordinated subscription management, and collaborative digitization could significantly expand access while optimizing resource utilization.

12.7 Reading Culture and Holistic Development

Maharashtra's "Reading Sankalp" initiative represents a promising approach to promoting reading culture aligned with NEP's holistic development goals. University libraries have significant opportunities to contribute through reading promotion programmes, book clubs, and literacy initiatives.

12.8 Policy-Implementation Gap

Despite Maharashtra's proactive policy framework, a significant gap exists between policy intentions and ground-level implementation. Factors include inadequate funding, staff shortages, competing priorities, and limited awareness of policy provisions among library professionals.

13. Results

13.1 Awareness and Understanding

High awareness levels of NEP 2020's existence (87%) but moderate understanding of library implications (52%). University librarians showed greater understanding (78%) compared to professional assistants (48%).

13.2 Infrastructure Assessment

Only 35% of libraries reported adequate high-speed internet connectivity. Average of 25 computers per library with student-to-computer ratios ranging from 50:1 to 200:1. 82% used integrated library management systems. 41% offered off-campus access to e-resources. Only 12% had implemented RFID.

13.3 Digital Resources

Average of 5-8 e-database subscriptions per library. 38% maintained institutional repositories. 67% promoted NDLI resources. Average e-book holdings of 15,000 titles. 71% provided access to plagiarism detection software.

13.4 Professional Competencies

Only 42% rated their digital skills as adequate for NEP requirements. 58% had attended professional development in past three years. 63% expressed comfort with learning new technologies. 34% felt prepared for advanced research support.

13.5 User Perceptions

56% of students expressed satisfaction with library services. 68% of faculty expressed satisfaction. Only 41% of users were aware of available e-resources. 47% reported weekly library visits. 89% rated libraries as important for academic success.

13.6 NEP-Aligned Initiatives

44% had initiated services supporting multidisciplinary programmes. 27% had specialized services for differently-abled users. 53% conducted regular user education. 38% offered research support beyond basic access. 61% reported regular interaction with departments.

13.7 Challenges Identification

92% identified inadequate budgets as major challenge. 78% reported insufficient staff. 71% cited infrastructure limitations. 83% acknowledged need for enhanced staff competencies. 76% noted inadequate user awareness.

13.8 Regional Variations

Urban university libraries scored significantly higher on digital infrastructure indices. Libraries in Western Maharashtra demonstrated greater resource availability. Older universities had stronger print collections but similar digital resources.

14. Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 presents unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for university libraries in Maharashtra. This article establishes that libraries are central to NEP implementation, not peripheral to it. The policy's emphasis on holistic education, critical thinking, interdisciplinary research, and inclusive access fundamentally depends on robust library and information systems.

Maharashtra's university libraries possess significant strengths: established institutional presence, qualified workforce, rich collections, digital initiative experience, and supportive government frameworks. The state's proactive NEP implementation creates enabling conditions for library transformation.

However, substantial challenges must be addressed urgently: inadequate digital infrastructure, financial constraints, staff shortages, skill gaps, limited accessibility, and weak academic integration. These challenges are compounded by regional disparities threatening equitable implementation.

The digital transformation imperative emerges as particularly critical. NEP's vision of technology-enabled learning cannot be realized without corresponding investment in library digital infrastructure, resources, and competencies. Professional development of library staff requires urgent attention as expanded roles demand competencies beyond traditional library education.

Equity and inclusion require focused attention. Despite NEP's emphasis, university libraries remain inadequately equipped to serve diverse populations, particularly differently-abled students. Addressing this gap requires policy mandates and dedicated resource allocation.

Successful NEP implementation in Maharashtra depends significantly on transforming university libraries into dynamic, responsive, technology-enabled knowledge centres aligned with the policy's vision. This requires sustained commitment from state government, university administrations, library professionals, faculty, and students.

15. Suggestions and Recommendations

For State Government

1. Develop library-specific NEP implementation guidelines
2. Establish dedicated library development fund
3. Mandate library representation in implementation committees
4. Launch statewide library digital transformation initiative
5. Support formation of Maharashtra University Library Consortium
6. Include libraries in reading movement programmes
7. Establish accessibility standards with dedicated funding
8. Create professional development cell for library staff

For University Administrations

1. Integrate libraries into academic planning bodies
2. Increase library budget allocations
3. Fill vacant library positions and create new roles
4. Support library space transformation
5. Promote library usage through campus-wide campaigns
6. Establish library advisory committees
7. Support open access initiatives
8. Recognize library contributions in accreditation processes

For Library Professionals

1. Develop strategic plans aligned with NEP 2020
2. Embrace continuous professional development
3. Strengthen user engagement mechanisms
4. Enhance digital service portfolios
5. Develop research support services
6. Strengthen information literacy programmes
7. Forge collaborative partnerships
8. Document and share innovations

For Faculty and Academic Departments

1. Collaborate with library in curriculum design

2. Integrate information literacy into courses
3. Promote library resources to students
4. Contribute to institutional repositories
5. Participate actively in collection development
6. Utilize library spaces for innovative teaching

For Students

1. Develop information literacy skills
2. Explore digital resources
3. Provide constructive feedback
4. Utilize library spaces effectively
5. Engage with library programmes

16. Future Scope

This study opens several avenues for future research:

1. **Longitudinal studies** tracking library evolution over NEP implementation period
2. **Comparative studies** across Indian states to identify best practices
3. **Impact assessment studies** examining relationships between library development and educational outcomes
4. **Technology adoption studies** investigating factors influencing success
5. **Professional competency studies** examining evolving skill requirements
6. **Inclusive library services research** focusing on diverse user populations
7. **Library collaboration models** research exploring effective arrangements
8. **Interdisciplinary research support** investigations
9. **Reading promotion effectiveness** studies
10. **Economic analysis of library value** using cost-benefit approaches
11. **Digital divide studies** examining access variations
12. **Policy implementation research** examining how provisions translate into action

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