The Pivotal Role of Libraries in India's NEP 2020

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Abstract - The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) represents a paradigm shift in Indian education, as it focuses on equity, inclusiveness, multidisciplinarity, and the integration of digital and lifelong learning. This review examines the role of libraries-including school, academic, and public libraries-in the realisation of the vision of NEP 2020. It explores how these institutions have contributed to the realisation of transformational opportunities, the implementation of successes, the resolution of unresolved issues, and the development of strategic pathways. Academic articles, policy documents, and empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 were included in the systematic literature review, which was complemented by an analysis of recent case studies on library initiatives implemented under NEP 2020 in urban, rural, and tribal settings in India. NEP 2020 transforms libraries into vibrant centres for knowledge generation, digital literacy, multilingualism, and community engagement. Significant gains include up to a 20 per cent increase in enrolment and digital literacy in urban colleges, broader rural coverage by mobile digital units, and strengthened multidisciplinary and vocational education (supported by hybrid academic libraries). Nevertheless, rural ICT penetration remains at 25–40%, with a lack of funding and uneven staffing as key factors discouraging equitable implementation. International benchmarking indicates alignment with UNESCO/IFLA standards, yet deficiencies in the application of advanced technology persist. There is a need for continued investment in rural digitisation, the training of professional librarians, a national library services framework, and strengthened partnerships between the government and the business sector. Through full empowerment, libraries can become the pulse of NEP 2020, closing socio-economic gaps and helping India advance toward a knowledge-driven, inclusive, and globally competitive future.
Keywords: NEP 2020 in India, Education Reform, Vibrant Libraries, Digital Empowerment, Inclusive Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) was approved by the Government of India and is expected to revolutionise the educational environment by promoting equality, inclusivity, and quality education (Ministry of Human Resource and Development, 2020). It supersedes the 1986 policy and addresses modern issues, including the digital divide, skills development, and global competitiveness. Libraries, an integral part of the educational ecosystem, are essential to realising the vision of NEP 2020. They also serve as knowledge archives, facilitating the preservation of research, skills, and culture (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023).

Libraries have long been established as significant community learning units, supporting academic research, lifelong learning, and community participation (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). NEP 2020 promotes the concept of superior infrastructure, digital content, and a skilled workforce to meet the diverse needs of various users (Ministry of Human Resource and Development, 2020; Sivankalai, 2021). Studies consider libraries a significant solution to tackling digital literacy and promoting inclusivity in multidisciplinary education, yet problems such as a lack of funding and inequality in implementation remain (Batra, 2020; Mistry, 2022). Ethical issues such as equitable access and user privacy are also highlighted by libraries' use of digital platforms (Verma & Kumar, 2021). According to recent studies, libraries under NEP 2020 can significantly transform the educational landscape, particularly by facilitating open educational resources (OER) and reducing gaps between urban and rural regions (Badyal & Sharma, 2022; Kulal *et al.,* 2024). For example, research on the transformation of the role of libraries, as reported in NEP 2020, indicates a shift to hybrid models that utilise both physical and digital collections to enable flexible learning. Additional discussions examine how libraries can lead educational paradigm shifts by supporting interdisciplinary research and community outreach (Lamani & Girish Rathod, 2021; Lawande, 2024).

Moreover, empirical studies published between 2023 and 2025 indicate that libraries in higher education institutions play a significant role in translating the NEP's focus on vocational skills and lifelong learning. Nonetheless, the unequal distribution of resources remains an obstacle. Recent case studies of rural Indian libraries show the adoption of mobile digital units to increase accessibility, which aligns with NEP objectives regarding inclusivity. This review summarises these findings to understand the transformational opportunities libraries hold under NEP 2020 (Gandhi, 2022; Sivankalai, 2021).

II. LIBRARIES IN FOUNDATIONAL AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

NEP 2020 focuses on libraries as part of the development of universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2025,

promoting the expansion of school and community libraries with engaging, multilingual books. School libraries are intended to serve the community during non-school hours, especially in rural regions, while digital libraries are also suggested to increase accessibility to information. Libraries are standard facilities within school complexes to mitigate the shortage of books and laboratories in small schools, thereby providing these essential resources. Academic studies support this: libraries enhance the reading culture by facilitating book clubs, fairs, and events to support interdisciplinary and vocational education. Their transformation into a hybrid model with built-in ICT integration-providing 24/7 access and helping to close digital gaps-is emphasised by several studies (Arun *et al.,* 2022; Asif & Singh, 2022; Batra, 2020; Kulal *et al.,* 2024; Mistry, 2022).

A. Role in Higher Education and Research

The libraries in higher education promote the exploration of many fields by providing digital resources, e-journals, and institutional repositories. NEP 2020 promotes innovation achieved through collaboration, and libraries may serve as research centres equipped with data analysis and open-access publishing tools. They support skills development in information literacy, critical thinking, and digital tools, which aligns with the policy's focus on research-driven education (Jayamma *et al.,* 2023; Sontakke *et al.,* 2022; Umachagi & Selvi, 2022). Academic libraries are considered equity facilitators, offering training to overcome the digital divide and providing inclusive education to marginalised groups. A comparative analysis reveals that they have been transformed into digital-first spaces, fostering collaboration through maker spaces and workshops.

B. Public and Lifelong Learning Libraries

In the case of adult learning, NEP 2020 suggests that public libraries equipped with ICTs can serve as venues for conducting courses and community-related activities to facilitate lifelong learning. Efforts have been made to provide affordable books in Indian languages through rural libraries, mobile units, and social book clubs, ensuring that inexpensive and easily accessible books are available. The importance of libraries as a means of accessing cultural heritage and facilitating self-directed learning is highlighted in the literature, and the necessity of adequate staffing and professional development for librarians is emphasised (Abeyaratne & Ekanayake, 2019; Gandhi, 2022; Sivankalai, 2021; Zhou, 2022).

III. MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF NEP 2020

A. New Curriculum Structure for School Education

This new policy is rooted in four pillars: Access, Equity, Quality, and Accountability. The new policy introduces a 5+3+3+4 framework consisting of 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school and 12 years of school, replacing the old 10+2 framework. The Right to Education Act has been amended to cover children from 3 to 18 years instead of 6 to 14 years (MHRD, 2020; Verma & Kumar, 2021).

B. New Curriculum Structure for Higher Education

All higher education institutions will become multidisciplinary, each with an enrolment of at least 3,000 students by 2040. Music, literature, and art are to be taught in all higher education institutions. The M.Phil. degree will be discontinued. Beginning with a four-year undergraduate course, followed by a four-year postgraduate programme (3+1-year PG), a student can pursue a PhD. Previously, a PhD required completion of undergraduate, postgraduate, and M.Phil. studies. Higher education will follow the three-language system, and Sanskrit will be mainstreamed with consistent school-level offerings. By 2035, the gross enrolment ratio in higher education-including vocational education-should increase from 26.30% to 50% (NEP 2020 Highlights).

C. Integrated Teacher Education Programme

According to NEP 2020, ITEP will be the sole basis for hiring teachers starting in 2030. It also suggests that the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE 2021) be created to outline pre-service teacher education and training. The policy encourages schools to address teacher shortages-especially in subjects such as craft, art, dance, and music-by sharing teachers across off-campus premises. Teachers should be empowered to participate in setting the school's long-term policies and goals. A vital aspect of teacher autonomy is empowering and motivating teachers to perform optimally. Additionally, the policy aims to document and disseminate creative teaching strategies and pedagogies developed by Indian educators (MHRD, 2020; NEP 2020 Highlights; Press Information Bureau, 2020a; Umachagi & Selvi, 2022).

D. Medium of Teaching and Instruction

Under the Right to Education Act, 2009, Section 29(f) of Chapter V distinctly states, "The medium of teaching shall be the mother tongue of the child." National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Para 4.11, states that, wherever possible, the medium of teaching or instruction up to at least Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8 and beyond, should be the mother tongue, local language, or regional language. Thereafter, wherever possible, the local language will continue to be taught as a subject (MHRD, 2020; NEP 2020 Highlights; Press Information Bureau, 2020b).

E. Construction of Multidisciplinary Education Centres

The policy envisages the establishment of new schools and the infrastructural development of new education centres. Multidisciplinary Education Research and Development Universities are to be established as high-quality models of multidisciplinary education in the country, comparable to

IITs and IIMs, with top global standards (MHRD, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2020b; Umachagi & Selvi, 2022).

F. Yearly Assessment & National Assessment Centre

A new national assessment platform, PARAKH (Performance Appraisal, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), will be established. The Class 10 and 12 board exams will continue but will be redesigned to promote holistic growth. During a school year, students may take the board test twice: once for the primary exam and once for improvement, if desired. 360-degree holistic progress cards for all students will be redesigned for school-based assessment (MHRD, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2020b).

G. National Educational Technology Forum

The National Educational Technology Platform (NETF) has been created to provide a platform for advanced education, learning, administration, assessment, and the harnessing of innovative ideas (MHRD, 2020).

H. Common Entrance Exam

The National Testing Agency will conduct the Common Entrance Test for admission to higher education institutions (MHRD, 2020).

I. Setting up an Academic Bank of Credit

An Academic Bank will be established to store digital academic credits. The four-year course may also lead to a degree with coursework if the student completes a rigorous research project within the respective time limit (MHRD, 2020; Press Information Bureau, Highlights of NEP 2020).

J. Developing Inspirational and Enjoyable Books

Inspirational and motivational books will be created for students in local and Indian languages, and concrete steps will be taken to ensure that books are accessible to people with disabilities (Kumar & Singh, 2022; MHRD, 2020; Press Information Bureau, Highlights of NEP 2020).

K. Setting up Bal Bhavans

NEP 2020, Para 7.11, recommends that every state should be encouraged to strengthen or establish "Bal Bhavans," where children of all ages may attend classes once a week or more frequently. These may also function as exclusive daytime boarding schools. Children can participate in sports-related, career-related, and arts-related activities (Bal Bhavans).

L. Promoting Libraries

A national book promotion policy has been drafted, considering the quality, availability, and readership of books across various geographical regions, language levels, and genres, to ensure comprehensive measures are undertaken (Press Information Bureau, Highlights of NEP 2020).

IV. FEATURES OF NEP 2020 FOR LIBRARIES

The Government of India will support libraries and provide adequate staffing to grow, construct, and expand current library facilities in accordance with the National Education Policy 2020. This will enable libraries to satisfy the demands of all kinds of readers nationwide.

A. Information Resources and Education Hub

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises libraries as key resource hubs for education and learning. NEP 2020 focuses on raising the gross enrolment rate in higher education to 100%. To accomplish this, libraries must ensure an adequate and well-curated reading stock, along with the easy availability and interoperability of all types of resources in academic and advanced education libraries. This section will play a larger role, rather than being restricted to traditional services; a visionary approach is urgently needed. NEP 2020 is vital for society, and libraries must be upgraded and valued accordingly. Although the policy's focus on libraries is less visible, the argument for strengthening library services must be emphasised, and NEP 2020 should give more consideration to enhancing library services and facilities (Asif & Singh, 2022; Jayamma et al., 2023; Shukla & Bajpai, 2020).

B. Adequate Collections of Resources

Library collections support various languages, institutions, diverse functions, and disciplinary efforts. Currently, the nature of libraries and their collections is evolving toward new generations and technologies to meet the cultural needs of the world, scholarly interests, and the development of problem-solving communication. The strategy also states that libraries must stock resources from all fields and develop a good number and quality of materials to encourage collaboration between libraries and educational institutions (Asif & Singh, 2022; Lamani & Girish Rathod, 2021).

C. Adequate and Well-Trained Library Staff

To manage library services for readers, instructors, and trainers, and to provide an appropriate career path for them, NEP 2020 requires the creation of vacancies for well-trained library workers. Additional strategies include strengthening all libraries, developing reading rooms and rural libraries in disadvantaged areas, offering reading materials in Indian languages, launching mobile and children's libraries, and establishing social book clubs throughout India (Itsekor et al., 2019; Lawande, 2024; Shukla & Bajpai, 2020).

D. Suitable Infrastructure for Higher Education

To enable all willing individuals to participate in adult education, study, and lifelong learning, the necessary

infrastructure will be made available. Utilising schools and their facilities after school hours and on weekends-combined with information and communication technologies and other engagement and promotional activities-will be a significant step in this direction. To ensure that physical and human resources are used efficiently, it will be essential to share infrastructure across schools, higher education, adult education, vocational education, and other community and volunteer activities (Jayamma *et al.,* 2023; NEP 2020 Highlights; Sontakke *et al.,* 2022; Umachagi & Selvi, 2022).

E. Online Resources and Digital Literacy

Online resources for digital libraries are addressed in NEP 2020, and efforts will be made to expand online access to library books and widely used digital library platforms. Information literacy is an admirable curriculum that libraries have begun implementing. The fifth criterion of information literacy states that an "information-literate user understands the many social, legal, and economic issues surrounding information and uses information legally and ethically." As society is now dominated by ICT, no library remains untouched. Users should be familiar with the various information resources available so they can utilise them according to their needs. Libraries should categorise information and provide it based on user requirements. The growth factors and implications of NEP 2020 for Indian libraries are significant. Libraries must adapt their services to reflect the increasing use of ICT in all operations. The Government prioritises top-quality online education and digital learning tools for users across schools and higher education institutions (Lamani & Girish Rathod, 2021; Lawande, 2024).

F. Making Books Available and Accessible

The primary goal of NEP 2020 is to create high-quality books and materials that are accessible to the public and readers, thereby supporting the development of high-quality education and research. Enhancing book accessibility and availability is crucial for fostering a love of reading in communities and educational institutions. The Government will strongly emphasise expanding the availability of books in public libraries and schools. NEP 2020 also includes provisions for making books and resources accessible to diverse and unique reader groups. Using contemporary ICT technologies nationwide, the Government will ensure that books are accessible to everyone, including individuals with disabilities and those with varying abilities. The primary focus will be on socio-economically deprived areas and rural/remote regions (Asif & Singh, 2022).

G. Availability of All Learning Materials

NEP 2020 is upgrading existing libraries. This policy includes several measures to foster the rapid growth of libraries in the digital age. Libraries will be essential to advancing research and education in the contemporary digital era. They will help establish a standard education system and guide national progress. As technology advances, it becomes essential for educational institutions to use it effectively. Schools and higher education institutions increasingly adopt digital learning platforms to enhance student learning and academic outcomes. Many technology-based learning options are available, such as online courses, apps, TV channels, digital resources, online books, and numerous learning centres, all of which support strengthening libraries for digital learning (Asif & Singh, 2022).

H. Role of Government

Cooperation between the Centre and the States is necessary for establishing and supporting library services. The Government shall take steps to develop libraries and ensure that books are accessible throughout the country, including to those living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; MHRD, 2020).

V. CASE STUDY

To bridge theoretical provisions with practical outcomes, this section synthesises five empirical case studies on library implementations under NEP 2020, drawn from recent surveys and analyses (2023–2025). These illustrate successes, challenges, and scalable strategies.

A. School Libraries Across India: Empirical Survey (Mondal, 2025)

This was inferred through a systematic survey of 200 school libraries in urban, rural, and tribal schools, which revealed some level of achievement of the basic literacy aspirations outlined in the NEP. Such successes have been witnessed, with 65 per cent of urban schools incorporating digital reading programs and a 20 per cent increase in enrolment.

1. Problems: Rural libraries (40% coverage) have insufficient infrastructure, and only 25% are equipped with ICT tools.
2. Strategies: Mobile libraries and community partnerships improved access by 15% in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

B. Libraries in North East India: Multi-Ethnic Challenges (Bal Bhavans; Press Information Bureau (Highlights of NEP 2020); Hazarika & Sudhier, 2023)

In eight Northeastern states, libraries modified the multilingual services of the NEP by creating collections in indigenous languages, which served approximately 500,000 users. An example from tribal schools in Assam found that reading habits had risen by 30 per cent using the localised digital archives. Nevertheless, a 50% implementation gap was observed in remote locations due to cultural diversity. A recommendation was made to fund Bal Bhavans, which were extended to libraries, to improve equity.

C. Blended Learning in Academic Libraries: Student Perceptions (Sharma et al., 2022)

At one of the universities in Delhi, the multidisciplinary focus of NEP was supported by libraries offering blended learning centres, with 3,000 students accessing e-resources. Eighty per cent said they had become more digitally literate, which aligns with NETF objectives.

1. Problem: 35 per cent of rural students face issues with access due to poor connectivity.
2. Result: The gap in hybrid workshops was narrowed by one quarter.

D. Transforming Educational Resources: Digital Projects for Tribal Communities (Empowering Mission Shakti)

In the tribal areas of Odisha, through NEP libraries, customised digital platforms for women and youth have been established, reaching 10,000 users with vocational e-books.

1. Success: 40 per cent participation in skill development.
2. Gap: 60 per cent of locations lack adequate infrastructure.
3. Scalable model: Remote access model vans that are ICT-enabled.

VI. COMPARISON WITH GLOBAL POLICIES

This section compares the library provisions of NEP 2020 with key global frameworks, including the UNESCO/IFLA manifestos, US education policies, and the EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027). The comparisons focus on roles in achieving equitable access, promoting digital literacy, fostering inclusivity, and practical implementation.

A. Comparison with the UNESCO/IFLA Public Library Manifesto (Devi et al., 2024; IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 2022)

The IFLA-UNESCO Manifesto emphasises libraries as agents of sustainable development, promoting equitable access to information, digital literacy, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

1. Resemblances: NEP 2020 emphasises inclusive education, bilingual content, and lifelong learning. Both encourage libraries to be centres of digital skills and cultural heritage.
2. Comparison: UNESCO/IFLA are agencies that advocate for government-owned assets internationally, while NEP 2020 is more country-specific, focusing less on global cooperation. The NEP provisions concerning rural libraries align with UNESCO's needs regarding access in marginalised areas. Nevertheless, India still has several years to progress before reaching international standards in technology integration.

B. Comparison with US Education Policies (US Education System; Rathod, 2025)

US guidelines (American Library Association guidelines and Department of Education frameworks) strongly integrate libraries into higher education, providing librarians with faculty status and funding for digital projects.

1. Similarities: NEP 2020 and US policy consider libraries as strategic partners for digital literacy, OERs, and interdisciplinary learning.
2. Differences: US libraries are more advanced in AI and ethics (media literacy courses), with 68% of faculty using AI tools compared to 27% in India. This contrasts with the NEP, which has aspirational objectives, as opposed to the benchmark-oriented approach of the US, where librarians co-teach.

C. Comparison with the EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)

The EU plan aims to make education digital, focusing on inclusiveness and competencies, and libraries (particularly public ones) serve as community spaces where people can access digital education and support sustainability.

1. Similarities: NEP promotes digital equity, OERs, and bridging divides. Both encourage libraries in lifelong learning.
2. Differences: The EU more explicitly integrates libraries into wider urban and green policies, with systematic financing of digital solutions, whereas NEP focuses on national infrastructure, with no direct EU-like sustainability association. EU sensitisation of public libraries may offer insights for improving NEP's rural coverage.

NEP 2020 places a similar emphasis on equity and digital transformation as global frameworks, but stronger implementation mechanisms will be needed to achieve parity with developed models in the US and EU.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The NEP 2020 highlights libraries as the centre of educational transformation in India, emphasising their role in promoting equity, digital inclusion, literacy, reading, and knowledge production. According to the analysis of literature and case studies, notable achievements include urban digital initiatives that have increased enrolment by 20% (Mondal, 2025), as well as innovative approaches that break down social barriers in rural communities, such as mobile libraries (Empowering Mission Shakti). Funding constraints, disparities in ICT infrastructure coverage (25% in rural areas), and the lack of implementation in remote areas are some of the challenges NEP faces in achieving its inclusive objectives.

Comparisons worldwide demonstrate that NEP facilitates multilingual access through frameworks established by UNESCO/IFLA. However, the inconsistencies also reflect insufficient advancements in future technologies (AI integration at 27% vs. 68% in the US) and global cooperation. The gaps suggest several areas that require further research, such as the professionalisation of librarians, sustainable allocation standards, and ethical digital practices. Through qualitative analysis, NEP–library interactions appear dynamic, where libraries will continue to evolve into hybrid hubs, and policy adjustments will be necessary to achieve unbiased results. To address the disparities between urban and rural areas and align with global standards, future research must examine the longitudinal implications after 2030, particularly regarding vocational and lifelong education (US Education System; IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 2022).

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact of NEP 2020 on libraries can be maximised through the following strategies:

1. Prioritise Rural Digitisation: Invest in ICT infrastructure for rural libraries, aiming for 75% coverage by 2030, utilising scalable models such as mobile digital vans.
2. Professional Development: Establish national training programmes for librarians, emphasising digital literacy, data management, and inclusive practices to align with global standards.
3. National Library Services Framework: Develop a centralised framework to standardise funding, staffing, and resource allocation, addressing underutilisation and disparities.
4. Public-Private Partnerships: Foster collaborations to fund digital libraries and OERs, reducing urban–rural divides and supporting NEP's 50% GER target by 2035.
5. Ethical Digital Practices: Incorporate data privacy and ethical information-use training to align with international standards, including those of the US and the EU.
6. Community Engagement: Develop book clubs and Bal Bhavans to foster a reading culture and promote learning, particularly in marginalised communities.

IX. CONCLUSION

This review confirms that the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) recognises libraries as invaluable cornerstones of India's educational transformation endeavour, encouraging equity, inclusivity, digital empowerment, and lifelong learning at all levels, including foundational, school, higher education, and public domains. The policy re-establishes libraries as places of knowledge creation, learning, and socio-cultural experiences by promoting multilingual collections, hybrid infrastructure, the integration of ICT, community outreach, and open educational resources. According to recent empirical research (2023–2025), there are significant improvements: urban libraries have become more digitally literate and

digitally enrolled; mobile digital libraries and localised collections have become more effective in improving access in rural and tribal areas; and blended learning centres in tertiary education have become effective in helping close the digital divide and promote multidisciplinary and vocational education. These outcomes align with international practices, such as the UNESCO/IFLA Public Library Manifesto and the EU Digital Education Action Plan. Nevertheless, challenges remain: shortages of resources and insufficient ICT infrastructure in rural areas (with coverage of less than 25–40 per cent), inequitable distribution of staff, and the sluggish adoption of new technologies require urgent attention. India will need to emphasise rural digitisation (mobile and solar-powered), a National Library Services Framework, national librarian training on digital and ethical practices, and open-access resource partnerships with the public and commercial sectors to achieve the vision of NEP 2020. Through long-term government investment, institutional change, and community involvement, libraries can overcome urban–rural boundaries, contribute to achieving the 50 per cent gross enrolment target by 2035, and help make India a knowledge-based and equitable society. NEP 2020 is, therefore, a historic opportunity to transform libraries into the heartbeat of the Indian education system and engines of holistic and globally competitive development.

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