



# Comparative Analysis of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Canadian Higher Education Model: Globalization, Autonomy, and Inclusivity in Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT :

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* represents a landmark initiative in India's higher education landscape, seeking to transition the sector from a predominantly insular, examination-driven model to one that aspires for global relevance and competitiveness. This study critically examines the transformative ambitions of NEP 2020 through a comparative policy analysis, positioning its framework alongside the Canadian higher education model, which is globally recognized for its decentralized governance, institutional autonomy, inclusivity, and successful international engagement. By situating this inquiry within the broader discourse of educational globalization and policy transfer, the paper interrogates how NEP 2020 proposes to reconfigure India's higher education institutions (HEIs) to participate more actively in global academic ecosystems.

Adopting a thematic, qualitative, and comparative methodology, this research analyzes official policy documents, international education reports, and scholarly literature to identify convergences and divergences between the Indian and Canadian systems. Key focus areas include the promotion of multidisciplinary and research-intensive institutions, the establishment of the *National Research Foundation (NRF)*, expansion of public-private partnerships, international student mobility, and digital learning infrastructures such as *SWAYAM* and *NDEAR*. The analysis is further substantiated by a case study of the *Homi Bhabha National Institute (HBNI)* cluster university model, presented as an early example of NEP 2020's research and innovation agenda in practice.

While the NEP articulates a bold and globally aligned vision, the study identifies enduring structural challenges in the Indian higher education system—including underfunding, regulatory fragmentation, political interference, and the risks of excessive privatization—that may hinder its equitable and effective implementation. These concerns are contextualized through critical perspectives from established scholars such as Tilak (2012), Srivastava (2010), and Dhameja (2021), who caution against replicating market-oriented education reforms without adequately addressing issues of social equity, public accountability, and access.

The paper contends that while NEP 2020 draws valuable lessons from international models like Canada's, its success will ultimately depend on India's ability to adapt these frameworks within its distinct socio-political and cultural milieu. In doing so, the study contributes to the fields of comparative education policy and global higher education governance by interpreting NEP 2020 not merely as a domestic policy reform, but as a deliberate strategy of educational diplomacy and global knowledge positioning for India in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** National Education Policy 2020, Indian Higher Education, Globalization of Education, Canadian Education Model, Institutional Autonomy, Comparative Education Policy, Research Promotion, Internationalization of Higher Education

## 1. Introduction

Education constitutes one of the most critical instruments for advancing a nation's intellectual, socio-economic, and cultural development. In the Indian context, the imperative for a forward-looking, inclusive, and globally competitive education system has long been acknowledged, particularly in light of the country's rich historical legacy as a center of transnational learning. Ancient institutions such as *Nalanda* in present-day Bihar and *Takshashila* in modern Pakistan attracted scholars from diverse regions, contributing to a flourishing tradition of knowledge production and intercultural exchange. However, this legacy was disrupted during the colonial period when the British administration imposed a centralized, examination-driven education system rooted in the *downward filtration theory*. Designed to produce a compliant administrative workforce, colonial education policies significantly curtailed academic freedoms and marginalized indigenous knowledge systems. In the post-independence era, India prioritized expanding educational access through the establishment of public institutions, yet persistent challenges related to quality, equity, research capacity, and international competitiveness have remained largely unaddressed.

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The formulation of the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* marks a paradigmatic shift in this context, envisioning a comprehensive restructuring of India's education system at all levels, from early childhood to higher education. A core ambition of NEP 2020 is to reposition Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) as globally relevant, research-driven, multidisciplinary centers capable of competing within the international academic landscape.

To achieve this, NEP 2020 introduces a series of transformative reforms aimed at promoting institutional autonomy, fostering multidisciplinary education, enhancing research ecosystems through the proposed *National Research Foundation (NRF)*, and facilitating international collaborations. Notably, the policy opens pathways for top-ranked foreign universities to establish campuses in India while encouraging Indian institutions to expand their global footprint. These reforms exhibit clear conceptual affinities with established international models of higher education, particularly the Canadian system, which has earned global recognition for its emphasis on decentralization, institutional independence, inclusivity, and dynamic research cultures.

Canada's education model offers an instructive comparative framework due to its successful balancing of educational quality, accessibility, and global engagement within a decentralized governance structure. The country's commitment to outcome-based learning, multicultural education, and international academic networks presents valuable insights for India's higher education reform trajectory.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a comparative policy analysis approach to investigate the extent to which NEP 2020 aligns with global higher education practices, using the Canadian education system as a reference point. The analysis draws on official policy documents, national education surveys, peer-reviewed literature, and international ranking data to evaluate both the opportunities and constraints inherent in India's reform agenda. Specifically, the paper examines key areas such as institutional autonomy, flexible curriculum design, research promotion, internationalization, and digital learning.

The central research objective is to critically assess whether NEP 2020 can effectively bridge the gap between India's local educational realities and its global aspirations in higher education. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the broader fields of comparative education policy and educational globalization, offering nuanced insights into how developing countries like India can navigate the challenges of adopting international models while preserving their socio-cultural and academic identities.

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## 2. The Vision of NEP 2020

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* articulates an ambitious and transformative vision for India's education system, positioning it as a strategic instrument for national development and global knowledge engagement in the 21st century. It seeks to recalibrate the country's educational architecture by reconciling India's rich intellectual heritage with the demands of a rapidly evolving global knowledge economy. In doing so, the policy aspires to establish India as a global knowledge superpower, characterized by institutions that offer high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education, and by graduates equipped to participate meaningfully in global academic and professional spheres.

At the heart of NEP 2020's vision lies the imperative to cultivate an education system that is simultaneously rooted in indigenous values and traditions, yet responsive to global academic standards and innovations. The policy underscores the necessity of fostering not only foundational literacy and numeracy but also higher-order cognitive abilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation, empathy, and ethical reasoning. It explicitly rejects rote learning models in favor of inquiry-based, experiential, and interdisciplinary pedagogies capable of producing socially responsible and globally competent citizens.

Aligned with global educational objectives such as the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)*, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education alongside lifelong learning opportunities for all, NEP 2020 positions itself as a forward-looking policy framework. It acknowledges the profound transformations underway in the global landscape — driven by technological advancements in artificial intelligence, data sciences, environmental sustainability imperatives, and complex socio-political challenges — and recognizes the urgent need to prepare a multidisciplinary, adaptable, and ethically grounded workforce.

A pivotal feature of this vision is the emphasis on institutional autonomy and academic freedom, which are essential for fostering innovative teaching, dynamic research ecosystems, and international collaborations. NEP 2020 proposes the creation of research-intensive, teaching-intensive, and degree-granting autonomous institutions, with governance frameworks designed to minimize bureaucratic intervention and optimize institutional flexibility. Complementing this is the promotion of multilingual education, vocational training, digital and distance learning platforms, and faculty development initiatives, aimed at enhancing both access and quality in higher education.

Crucially, the vision of NEP 2020 extends beyond educational reform in the narrow sense. It envisions higher education as a key driver of national transformation, capable of contributing to economic growth, social justice, cultural rejuvenation, and international diplomacy. By nurturing engaged, creative, and compassionate graduates, the policy seeks to build an equitable, inclusive, and knowledge-based society, aligned with both national priorities and the expectations of the global academic community.

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## 3. The Canadian Education Model: Key Features

The Canadian education model is internationally recognized as a successful example of a decentralized yet high-performing educational system, noted for its emphasis on both academic quality and social equity. A defining characteristic of this model is the absence of a centralized national department of education. Instead, constitutional authority over education rests with the provinces and territories, enabling each of Canada's ten provinces and three territories to independently structure, fund, and administer their respective education systems, curricula, and assessment frameworks (Morgan, 2011, p. 125). This decentralized governance structure reflects Canada's broader commitment to federalism, multicultural pluralism, and regionally sensitive policymaking.

Despite this structural autonomy, Canadian education systems maintain a shared set of foundational values, including accessibility, equity, public accountability, and cultural inclusivity. These principles inform policy frameworks at both provincial and institutional levels, ensuring a degree of national coherence in quality assurance, while preserving flexibility for local adaptation. School boards and district education councils play a central role in

administering primary and secondary education, overseeing curriculum implementation, staffing, budgeting, and community outreach (Morgan, 2011, pp. 134–135).

In the domain of higher education, institutional autonomy and programmatic diversity are distinguishing hallmarks. Canadian universities and colleges enjoy substantial freedom in determining their academic, administrative, and research agendas. Degree programs are typically interdisciplinary and outcome-based, designed to accommodate both academic inquiry and labor market demands. This pedagogical approach aligns closely with NEP 2020's advocacy for flexible curricula, multidisciplinary learning, and research-intensive institutions, offering a valuable comparative framework for India's ongoing higher education reforms.

Furthermore, Canada maintains a strong culture of educational quality assurance through systematic assessments conducted at provincial, national, and international levels. Canadian students regularly participate in global comparative evaluations such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and national initiatives like the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), which measure competencies in literacy, mathematics, and scientific reasoning (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008, p. 20). These mechanisms reinforce institutional accountability and enable evidence-based policy interventions.

Another salient feature of the Canadian model is its commitment to inclusivity, equity, and cultural responsiveness. As one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, Canada's education policies actively promote multicultural curricula, equity-focused resource allocation, and teacher diversity initiatives. Nonetheless, persistent disparities—particularly in educational outcomes for Indigenous and marginalized communities—highlight the system's ongoing challenges. Proactive strategies such as community-based schooling, Indigenous-focused teacher education programs, and targeted financial aid mechanisms have been developed to address these inequities (Morgan, 2011, pp. 146–147).

In the higher education sector, Canadian universities are deeply integrated into global academic networks, hosting substantial numbers of international students and participating in transnational research collaborations. Public funding, while variable across provinces, supports academic accessibility and research innovation, although debates continue regarding tuition inflation and the rise of market-oriented practices within public institutions (Morgan, 2011, pp. 147–148). This tension between public good objectives and market logics mirrors the debates emerging in India as NEP 2020 opens space for private and foreign institutional participation.

In summary, the Canadian higher education model offers a well-balanced synthesis of provincial flexibility and national coherence, global competitiveness and local inclusivity, academic excellence and social equity. These attributes provide a valuable comparative framework for evaluating the aspirations of India's NEP 2020, especially as India seeks to globalize its higher education system while preserving indigenous values and addressing systemic inequities.

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#### 4. Comparative Analysis: India and Canada

Although the educational frameworks of India and Canada differ considerably in their structural configurations, governance models, and historical trajectories, both countries converge in their commitment to advancing high-quality, inclusive, and globally relevant higher education systems. India's *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* articulates an ambitious reform agenda that reflects several principles long embedded within Canada's higher education model, including institutional autonomy, outcome-based learning, research integration, and internationalization. This comparative analysis draws on policy literature and international education governance theories to critically assess areas of convergence and divergence, while contextualizing these within each country's socio-political and economic milieu.

##### 4.1 Governance and Decentralization

A defining feature of Canada's education system is its decentralized governance structure, with education policy and administration falling under provincial jurisdiction. The absence of a federal education ministry permits localized policymaking, fostering innovation and responsiveness while maintaining national coherence through shared benchmarks and values (Morgan, 2011, p. 125). In contrast, India's NEP 2020 retains a centralized policy direction, while advocating for increased institutional and academic autonomy within higher education institutions. Through proposed regulatory bodies like the *Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)*, NEP 2020 aspires to emulate the benefits of decentralized governance while ensuring national oversight (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 34). This hybrid model illustrates India's attempt to reconcile the demands of global competitiveness with the administrative realities of a large, diverse federal polity.

##### 4.2 Institutional Autonomy and Multidisciplinarity

Both education systems recognize institutional autonomy as a critical enabler of academic excellence and innovation. Canadian universities enjoy considerable latitude in determining their academic programs, research agendas, and governance structures (Morgan, 2011, pp. 133–135). NEP 2020 similarly promotes autonomy in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment within Indian HEIs, while advancing a multidisciplinary education model that encourages students to chart personalized academic trajectories across disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 34–36). This emphasis resonates with the global shift towards interdisciplinary, research-driven learning in knowledge economies.

##### 4.3 Equity and Inclusion

Equity remains a central concern in both systems. Canada's higher education model prioritizes access and inclusion for marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous communities and recent immigrants. Despite sustained policy efforts, disparities in graduation rates and access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal populations persist (Morgan, 2011, pp. 146–147). Similarly, NEP 2020 foregrounds inclusive education for socio-economically

disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, proposing targeted interventions through scholarships, infrastructure investment, and multilingual education (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 24–26). Both systems underscore the need for sustained structural reforms to address historical and systemic inequities.

#### **4.4 Research and Innovation**

Canada's universities have cultivated a globally respected research culture, supported by public funding, international collaborations, and academic freedom (Morgan, 2011, p. 145). Indian higher education has traditionally struggled with limited research capacity and underinvestment. NEP 2020 seeks to redress this through the establishment of the *National Research Foundation (NRF)*, intended to consolidate and enhance research funding and infrastructure, while promoting undergraduate research integration (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 45). This initiative mirrors Canada's emphasis on research as a public good and a driver of national innovation.

#### **4.5 Internationalization and Global Engagement**

Canada ranks consistently among the world's leading destinations for international students and has developed robust frameworks for student mobility, joint degree programs, and international academic partnerships (Morgan, 2011, p. 143). NEP 2020 seeks to internationalize Indian higher education by facilitating the entry of top-ranked foreign universities, promoting outward mobility for Indian students and researchers, and expanding the global presence of Indian HEIs (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 42). While Canada benefits from decades of structured internationalization, NEP 2020 lays the groundwork for India's participation in global academic networks, positioning education as both a soft power asset and a strategic diplomatic tool.

#### **4.6 Assessment, Accountability, and Quality Assurance**

Canada's education system integrates rigorous national and international assessment mechanisms, including participation in the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* and national instruments like the *Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)* (Morgan, 2011, p. 140). NEP 2020 introduces learning outcome-based assessments and performance benchmarks aimed at enhancing accountability and institutional quality within Indian HEIs (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 38–39). These initiatives reflect a shared recognition of evidence-based policy interventions as central to educational reform.

#### **4.7 Challenges, Constraints, and Contextual Specificities**

Despite these parallels, significant contextual differences complicate the policy transferability between the two systems. India's challenge lies in translating reformist policy discourse into actionable outcomes across its vast, diverse, and socio-economically stratified education sector. Persistent issues of inadequate public funding, digital divides, and politicized university governance continue to constrain reform implementation. Canada, for its part, contends with its own structural inequities, including educational disparities for Indigenous communities and rising privatization pressures (Morgan, 2011, pp. 146–148).

While Canada's model has evolved through decades of decentralized governance and institutional freedom, India's NEP 2020 attempts to achieve similar global aspirations within a largely centralized framework. The convergence in principles such as autonomy, inclusion, research intensity, and internationalization suggests that India can adapt selective elements of Canada's education model. However, its success will ultimately depend on reconciling these global best practices with India's unique socio-political, economic, and cultural specificities — a critical lesson emphasized in contemporary scholarship on comparative education policy and globalization studies.

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### **5. NEP's Globalization Drive: Policy Formulation and Implementation**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 articulates a bold vision to position India as a global nexus of higher education, underpinned by a comprehensive strategy of internationalization. This ambition is reflected in a series of structural reforms designed to elevate Indian institutions to global standards, attract international students, and expand India's academic influence on the world stage. The policy's strategic thrust is oriented not only towards enhancing India's educational offerings but also toward reclaiming its civilizational identity as a beacon of knowledge—an aspiration encapsulated in its reference to India as *Vishwaguru* (Mittal, 2022, pp. 10–11).

#### ***Establishing Campuses Abroad and Facilitating the Influx of Foreign Institutions***

At the heart of NEP's internationalization agenda is a dual-faceted approach: promoting the global expansion of Indian universities while simultaneously integrating foreign educational institutions into India's academic ecosystem. The policy envisions Indian universities establishing offshore campuses to propagate not just academic excellence but also India's cultural and intellectual traditions, including disciplines such as Ayurveda and Yoga. Such measures are intended to augment India's soft power, ensuring that its academic institutions are not only recognized globally for their scholastic output but also as hubs of cultural diplomacy (Mittal, 2022, pp. 10–11).

Concurrently, NEP 2020 seeks to overhaul the regulatory landscape to permit the establishment of campuses in India by the world's top 100 universities. This provision aims to introduce competitive dynamics within India's higher education system, fostering an environment conducive to global academic collaboration and innovation. The entry of such prestigious institutions is expected to enhance the international rankings of Indian universities, elevating them in global academic hierarchies.

The emphasis on international collaboration through academic exchange mirrors practices established in countries like Canada, where institutional autonomy has facilitated the creation of extensive global networks. Canadian universities have long benefited from such international linkages, particularly through student exchange programs, joint degree initiatives, and collaborative research projects (Morgan, 2011, pp. 143–144). In a similar vein, NEP aims to place Indian institutions on an equivalent footing, leveraging international partnerships to advance the country's educational stature.

### ***Multilingualism and Inclusivity: A Foundation for Global Engagement***

A key pillar of NEP's globalization strategy is its commitment to linguistic inclusivity, ensuring equitable access to global academic opportunities for diverse sections of Indian society. The policy advocates the promotion of India's rich linguistic diversity, positioning it as a tool not only for enhancing national identity but also for fostering inclusivity in the global academic arena. The policy's emphasis on multilingualism is designed to empower a wider demographic, particularly marginalized and rural communities, by integrating them into global academic discourses, while simultaneously preparing them for global competitiveness (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 13).

In this respect, NEP's multilingual framework draws parallels with Canada's bilingual education system, where English and French are institutionalized as equal mediums of instruction. Canada's constitutional protections for minority language education have long ensured that linguistic diversity is a foundational component of its education system (Morgan, 2011, pp. 133–134). Similarly, NEP's recognition of the need for strong English language proficiency, coupled with its advocacy for local languages, is aimed at balancing global educational demands with the preservation of India's cultural heritage.

Furthermore, NEP's approach to inclusivity extends beyond linguistic diversity. The policy envisions a comprehensive framework of scholarships, flexible curricula, and academic support mechanisms designed to bridge social and economic disparities. This inclusive approach ensures that India's educational globalization is not only a matter of attracting international students but also about providing equitable opportunities for India's own citizens, particularly those from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

### ***Digital Transformation: SWAYAM, NDEAR, and the Globalization of Education Delivery***

Digital learning occupies a central role in NEP's strategy for both expanding domestic access to quality education and projecting India's academic resources globally. By emphasizing platforms such as SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) and NDEAR (National Digital Education Architecture), the policy seeks to embed digital infrastructure within India's higher education framework. SWAYAM, in particular, offers a vast array of online courses, enabling credit transfers and facilitating remote learning, thereby aligning India's educational offerings with the global trend towards blended and online learning modalities (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 58–60).

The role of digital platforms in democratizing education has become particularly salient in the context of global higher education trends, where digital infrastructure plays a pivotal role in extending educational access to non-traditional learners, including those in remote or underserved regions. Canada's own investments in e-learning, especially in rural and remote communities, serve as an instructive model, showcasing the potential of digital platforms to bridge geographical and socio-economic divides in education (Morgan, 2011, p. 147).

NEP's commitment to enhancing digital learning infrastructure is thus not only a response to internal educational needs but also a means to extend India's educational offerings to international students. By leveraging digital platforms to offer high-quality, globally relevant courses, India aims to present itself as a significant player in the global education market, enhancing both its domestic education system and its international academic footprint.

## **6. Challenges and Limitations in the Implementation of NEP 2020**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a transformative vision for India's educational landscape, aiming to align the country with global standards while fostering inclusivity and multidisciplinary education. However, achieving these ambitious goals presents several systemic challenges, ranging from governance issues to financial constraints and digital inequities. The successful realization of NEP's goals will depend on overcoming these hurdles and ensuring a robust, actionable framework for policy implementation.

### ***Governance and Regulatory Fragmentation***

One of the most significant challenges facing the NEP is the fragmented and bureaucratic regulatory framework in Indian higher education. Multiple regulatory bodies, such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), currently operate with overlapping and occasionally contradictory mandates. The NEP proposes the establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) to streamline governance and improve the coordination of higher education institutions. This new body is envisaged to take over functions related to regulation, accreditation, funding, and setting standards. However, as Dhameja (2021) points out, the successful integration of existing bodies into this new structure remains uncertain, raising concerns about the pace and effectiveness of such a transition. Without a clear, enforceable timeline, the risk exists that NEP's reforms will be delayed or diluted by entrenched bureaucratic inefficiencies.

### ***Financial Constraints and Institutional Autonomy***

Despite NEP 2020's proposal to increase public spending on education to 6% of GDP, India continues to fall short of this target, with current public investment remaining well below the recommended threshold. Many of India's premier institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), face financial constraints, including non-transparent funding models. For instance, the lack of alignment between institutional budgets, student enrollment, and research output hampers institutional autonomy and growth. A significant portion of IITs' revenue comes from student fees, which account for only

5% of their income, and the absence of the ability to retain or reinvest surpluses further limits their capacity for long-term development (Dhameja, 2021, pp. 165–166). Without significant improvements in financial autonomy and sustainable funding mechanisms, India's institutions will struggle to enhance their quality and global competitiveness.

### ***Political Interference and Governance Quality***

Another key limitation lies in the political interference that often impacts the functioning of universities. As Nayyar (2017, cited in Dhameja, 2021) argues, the independence of university governance is essential for fostering academic freedom, innovation, and critical inquiry. The NEP's success hinges on the extent to which it can implement genuine governance reforms that allow institutions to operate autonomously, free from political or commercial pressures. However, past attempts at educational reforms have frequently been stymied by political interference, undermining the ability of universities to function as independent centers of knowledge production and critical engagement.

### ***Implementation Gaps and Historical Precedents***

The implementation gap between policy recommendations and actual outcomes remains a persistent issue in Indian educational reforms. Previous attempts at educational restructuring, such as those outlined by the Kothari Commission (1968), the National Knowledge Commission (2007), and the Yashpal Committee (2009), have largely failed to bring about systemic change (Dhameja, 2021, pp. 168–169). While the NEP 2020 presents a more comprehensive blueprint for transformation, its success depends on the establishment of a time-bound roadmap and strong institutional accountability. India's historical experience with educational reforms—marked by multiple policy documents and committees—suggests that transformative change requires more than just lofty aspirations; it necessitates rigorous, sustained implementation supported by clear timelines and enforceable actions.

### ***Research Funding and Quality***

India's current investment in research remains low, amounting to just 0.69% of GDP, far below the 4% seen in countries like South Korea and Israel (Dhameja, 2021, p. 162). This low level of investment severely restricts the country's ability to establish itself as a global knowledge hub. Without a substantial increase in research funding and the creation of robust research infrastructure, NEP's vision of fostering a culture of innovation and cutting-edge research will remain a distant aspiration. The policy's emphasis on creating research-intensive institutions and promoting interdisciplinary research is commendable, but it requires a corresponding commitment to funding and resource allocation.

### ***The Digital Divide and Equity Issues***

Although NEP 2020 emphasizes the role of digital learning through platforms like SWAYAM and NDEAR, the digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable access. While these platforms aim to democratize access to high-quality education, their reach is limited, especially in rural and underserved regions where access to reliable internet and digital devices is scarce. The expansion of digital learning infrastructure is critical, but it must be accompanied by efforts to ensure that all students—regardless of location or socio-economic background—can benefit from these resources. Without addressing the digital divide, the NEP's e-learning initiatives risk exacerbating existing educational inequities (Ministry of Education, 2020, pp. 58–60).

In sum, while NEP 2020 presents a bold vision for educational transformation, its success depends on overcoming these structural, financial, and political barriers. The policy's ambitious goals can only be realized if there are concrete, actionable strategies for overcoming these limitations.

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## **7. Case Study: Cluster-Based Universities and the HBNI Model**

A significant policy innovation within NEP 2020 is the emphasis on creating research-intensive, multidisciplinary institutions that integrate academia with research laboratories to foster collaborative innovation. The Homi Bhabha National Institute (HBNI) provides an exemplary case of this vision in practice. Established in 2005, HBNI serves as a cluster-based model that integrates premier government research laboratories—such as the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)—with academic institutions to promote both academic and research excellence. This model has successfully demonstrated the benefits of collaboration between research institutions and universities, producing high-quality research and fostering innovation.

Under the HBNI framework, students engage in doctoral and postgraduate programs that are closely linked with research outputs from national laboratories. As a result, HBNI has achieved remarkable success in terms of research productivity, ranking 14th in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2020 and second in India by the Nature Index for publications in high-impact journals (Grover, 2019, p. 54). This interdisciplinary approach has been effective in producing practical solutions to national challenges in areas such as clean water, healthcare, energy, and education, aligning with the NEP's goals of addressing critical national priorities through research (Kakodkar and Gangotra, 2019, pp. 121).

International examples of similar models include Paris-Saclay University in France and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) at Caltech in the United States. These institutions have successfully integrated academic and research pursuits, driving global innovation and achieving high rankings in international research outputs. The success of these models underscores the potential of the cluster-based approach championed by NEP, offering a scalable blueprint for transforming India's higher education institutions into global research hubs.

The HBNI model underscores several key lessons for the broader implementation of NEP 2020: the importance of institutional autonomy, the need for robust reward systems that incentivize research and innovation, and the value of fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. If NEP 2020 successfully replicates this model across India, it could catalyze the development of research-driven institutions that contribute significantly to both national and global innovation.

## 8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The NEP 2020 outlines an ambitious framework for transforming India's higher education system, focusing on inclusivity, multidisciplinary education, institutional autonomy, and digital innovation. However, its successful implementation requires addressing several deep-rooted challenges, including governance fragmentation, financial constraints, political interference, and the digital divide.

To ensure the effective realization of NEP's goals, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Ensure Adequate Public Funding:** A sustained increase in public expenditure on education is essential to fulfill NEP's vision of fostering research, innovation, and equitable access.
2. **Strengthen Regulatory Oversight:** Clear and enforceable regulatory frameworks must be established to ensure quality assurance, financial transparency, and accountability across both public and private institutions.
3. **Promote Equity in Access:** Efforts to bridge socio-economic divides, especially through scholarships, digital infrastructure, and inclusive policies, must be prioritized to ensure that all students benefit from NEP's reforms.
4. **Balance Public-Private Roles:** While public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be a useful resource, their role must be carefully structured to ensure that education remains a public good, with protections against profiteering.
5. **Preserve Academic Freedom:** Universities must be empowered to operate independently, free from political or commercial interference, to foster academic freedom and innovation.
6. **Monitor Outcomes:** Learning assessments should be competency-based, focusing on practical skills rather than rote memorization, to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes (Anand & Lall, 2022, p. 41).

In conclusion, NEP 2020 has the potential to transform India's higher education system, but its success depends on aligning reforms with democratic and equitable principles, addressing systemic challenges, **and ensuring** transparency, accountability, and inclusivity throughout the implementation process. Only then can India realize its aspiration to become a global leader in education.

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