

EVOLVING ROLES OF LIBRARIANS UNDER INDIA'S NEP 2020

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Abstract :

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a major paradigm shift in India's educational landscape, emphasizing holistic learning, interdisciplinarity, digital literacy, flexibility of curricula, and research orientation. These changes have strong implications for academic libraries and the profession of librarianship. This paper analyzes key changes introduced by NEP 2020 and examines how the roles, skills, and responsibilities of librarians must evolve in response. Based on a literature review and conceptual analysis, the study proposes a reimagined role map for the 21st-century librarian aligned with NEP 2020's vision, highlights challenges, and suggests strategies for implementation. The findings will be useful to library and information science (LIS) practitioners, policymakers, and academic institutions seeking to align library services with the NEP framework.

Keywords : NEP 2020, librarianship, academic library, digital transformation, interdisciplinarity, library services.

Introduction :

With the formal adoption of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) by the Government of India, the country ushered in a new era of reforms in school and higher education. The policy aims at holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible education, with a greater thrust on research, digital inclusion, lifelong learning, and equity.

NEP 2020 sets new expectations for institutions, curricula, modes of instruction, assessment, and governance. While much discourse has focused on curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional restructuring, an often under-discussed stakeholder in this transformation is the library and the librarian. Libraries are not mere book repositories; they are essential knowledge infrastructure. The shift in educational paradigms necessitates a corresponding shift in library services, roles, and capacities.

This paper seeks to explore (a) what NEP 2020 introduces in terms of change, particularly in higher education, (b) how these changes impact the functions and responsibilities of librarians, (c) how the role of the librarian is evolving, and (d) what challenges and strategies are visible for this transition.

Key Changes under NEP 2020 Relevant to Libraries and Information Services :

While NEP 2020 covers all levels of education, certain provisions are especially

relevant to libraries in higher education.

1. Multidisciplinarity / Interdisciplinary Education :

NEP 2020 encourages breaking down rigid disciplinary silos and enabling students to choose courses across streams (arts, science, humanities, vocational). This requires libraries to support cross-disciplinary information needs and integrate diverse collections. Sutar (2024) argues that libraries can act as catalysts in supporting interdisciplinary research.

2. Research Orientation from Undergraduate Level :

NEP 2020 emphasizes developing research skills even at the undergraduate level. This increases demand for research support services, data management, bibliometrics, research guidance, and access to advanced resources. Biswas (2024) highlights the need for college libraries to shift from a “traditional” to a “research-centric” model to support these ambitions.

3. Digital / Online / Blended Modes of Learning :

With the rise of technology-enhanced and hybrid learning, library services can no longer remain tied to physical collections alone. Digital repositories, e-resources, virtual reference, remote access, and digital literacy programs become essential. Sutar (2024) notes that NEP 2020’s emphasis on digital literacy aligns closely with library opportunities to provide e- resources, online platforms, and data analytics services.

4. Flexibility and Lifelong Learning :

NEP 2020 underscores flexible entry and exit points, multiple pathways, and lifelong learning opportunities. Libraries will need to support non-traditional learners such as mid-career professionals and continuing education participants. This positions libraries as platforms for lifelong access, professional development, and modular learning.

5. Equity, Inclusion, and Multilingualism :

NEP 2020 stresses equitable access to education, including for disadvantaged groups, differently-abled learners, and across linguistic diversity. Libraries must ensure inclusive services (assistive technologies, accessible content) and support multilingual collections. Acharya and Vagdal (2023) emphasize that academic libraries can strengthen multilingualism by offering resources in multiple languages and inclusive services.

6. Institutional Autonomy and Decentralization :

NEP 2020 proposes greater institutional autonomy in curriculum, governance, and innovation. This allows libraries greater flexibility to tailor their services, adopt new models, and experiment. Librarians, therefore, must engage in strategic planning and advocacy within institutional governance structures.

Traditional vs Emerging Roles: The Changing Role of the Librarian :

1. Traditional Role of Librarians :

Historically, librarians in academic institutions carried out roles such as:

- Acquisition, cataloging, classification, and collection management
- Circulation, lending, and reference services
- Maintaining physical infrastructure (reading rooms, stacks)
- Preservation of print collections
- Basic user orientation and bibliographic instruction

These roles were necessary but largely passive and supportive in nature.

2. Emerging / Expanded Roles under NEP 2020 :

Under NEP 2020, librarians must expand their functions to align with new academic goals.

- **Research Partner / Facilitator** : Supporting systematic reviews, bibliometric analysis, citation management, research data handling, and literature support for grant writing.
- **Information Literacy Educator** : Delivering training in information, digital, and data literacy, research skills, and referencing tools.
- **Content Curator & Digital Librarian** : Managing e-resources, institutional repositories, OER, multimedia, and datasets.
- **Instructional Designer / Learning Architect** : Collaborating with faculty to embed library resources into curricula and modules.
- **Technology Integrator / Innovation Agent** : Overseeing library automation, discovery systems, analytics, mobile services, AI tools, and linked data.
- **Community & Outreach Liaison** : Building engagement with departments, students, industry, and the community by positioning the library as a collaborative hub.
- **Inclusivity & Accessibility Champion** : Ensuring resources for differently-abled users and multilingual content access.
- **Strategic Planner & Policy Advocate** : Participating in institutional planning, advocating for budgets, and aligning library strategies with NEP goals.

- **Continuous Learner / Change Agent** : Updating skills, adopting new practices, and leading library transformation.

Such emerging roles are increasingly recognized in LIS literature (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023; Ghumbre & Bajgude, 2024).

3. Role Shifts: Key Transformations :

- From gatekeeper to enabler: Librarians now enable discovery and knowledge sharing.
- From reactive to proactive: Instead of only responding to requests, librarians actively collaborate with faculty and curriculum development.
- From support unit to strategic unit: Libraries become integral to institutional research and teaching missions.
- From local to global / networked: Through digital platforms and consortia, libraries engage beyond campus boundaries.
- From mono-disciplinary to multidisciplinary: Librarians support research and learning across subject areas.

Challenges in Transition :

Despite the potential, several challenges must be addressed.

1. Skill Gaps & Training Needs :

Many librarians lack expertise in digital technologies, data analytics, bibliometrics, programming, and instructional design. Continuous professional development is essential. Magar (2025) notes that LIS education itself requires restructuring to meet NEP expectations.

2. Infrastructure and Funding Constraints :

Upgrading infrastructure for digitization, servers, discovery tools, high-speed internet, and AI-driven services demands significant funding, which may be difficult for under-resourced institutions.

3. Resistance to Change & Institutional Culture :

Some faculty and administrators continue to view libraries in a traditional light. Securing acceptance and embedding librarians in curriculum planning may face resistance.

4. Licensing, Copyright & Legal Constraints :

Managing e-resources, licensing, copyright, and digital rights is legally complex. Librarians must navigate these frameworks carefully.

5. Sustainability & Maintenance :

Innovative digital services require continuous updating and maintenance. Ensuring long- term sustainability is critical.

6. Equity & Access Disparities :

Institutions in remote or underprivileged areas may lack digital connectivity, creating disparities in access to library services.

Proposed Strategies & Roadmap :

a. Revamp LIS Education & Training :

- Update LIS curricula to include data science, digital scholarship, AI, analytics, and research support.
- Offer certifications, webinars, and continuous learning for working librarians.
- Encourage internships and faculty collaborations to build applied skills.

b. Institutional Integration & Collaboration :

- Involve librarians in curriculum design committees.
- Form cross-functional groups (library + faculty + IT) for planning learning spaces and digital initiatives.
- Position libraries as interdisciplinary learning commons.

c. Strengthen Infrastructure & Digital Resources :

- Invest in repositories, discovery platforms, linked open data, and analytics dashboards.
- Ensure consortial access to e-resources and archives.
- Use cloud services and virtualization for cost efficiency.

d. Offer Value-Added Services :

- Provide bibliometrics, citation mapping, and data services.
- Promote embedded librarianship and co-teaching in courses.
- Use gamification, MOOCs, and outreach for learner engagement.

e. Policy Advocacy & Funding Mobilization :

- Advocate for sustainable library budgets and recognition.
- Seek institutional and external grants for library innovation.

- Collaborate with consortia and national bodies to shape policies.

f. Equity & Inclusivity Measures :

- Provide assistive technologies (screen readers, Braille, captioning).
- Offer multilingual resources and user interfaces.
- Support rural learners via mobile and offline library systems.
- Ensure open access policies and repository mandates.

g. Monitoring, Evaluation & Feedback :

- Develop performance indicators aligned with NEP goals.
- Collect user feedback and usage analytics for improvement.
- Share innovations and case studies within the LIS community.

Conclusion :

The transition under NEP 2020 presents both opportunities and challenges. Librarians who embrace these changes can become central to institutional transformation, research culture, and student success. However, success requires strong institutional support, funding, skill development, and cultural change.

The transformation is not about doing more with the same skills, but about redefining the librarian's identity—from a custodian of collections to an active enabler of learning, discovery, and innovation. Libraries that adapt proactively will be well positioned to support NEP 2020's vision of a flexible, inclusive, and research-driven educational ecosystem.

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