

# IMPACT OF NEP-2020 ON ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract :

*The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) is a landmark reform in the Indian higher education system, with wide-ranging implications for academic libraries and information centres. Libraries, traditionally seen as repositories of knowledge, are now positioned as central to the vision of multidisciplinary learning, digital literacy, and lifelong education envisaged by the policy. This paper examines the opportunities and challenges that NEP-2020 creates for academic libraries. Drawing on both historical scholarship on library science and recent studies on NEP implementation, the study outlines how libraries can evolve into active learning hubs that facilitate access to digital resources, promote open educational resources (OERs), and support research. However, it also highlights constraints such as limited infrastructure, funding shortages, lack of trained manpower, and uneven digital readiness across institutions. By synthesizing older theories (Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science) with recent scholarship, the paper argues that libraries must embrace innovation, collaboration, and capacity building to remain relevant in the NEP era. Recommendations for policy and practice are offered to ensure that academic libraries emerge as critical enablers of NEP-2020 goals.*

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## Introduction :

The introduction of the National Education Policy 2020 marked a major turning point in the trajectory of Indian higher education. It replaced the National Policy on Education (1986, revised in 1992) and sought to reorient the educational landscape towards holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning (Government of India, 2020). The policy emphasizes learner-centric approaches, integration of technology, promotion of regional languages, global competitiveness, and a strong push for research and innovation. At the heart of these goals lies the recognition of information access and knowledge dissemination as critical enablers of educational reform. This places academic libraries and information centres in a position of strategic importance.

Historically, libraries have been viewed as essential institutions that preserve knowledge, enable scholarly communication, and provide equitable access to learning resources. Ranganathan's (1931) Five Laws of Library Science, especially "Every book its reader" and "Save the time of the reader," underscore the service-oriented nature of libraries,

principles that remain highly relevant in the NEP-2020 era. The policy's emphasis on digital education, open access, and multidisciplinary learning resonates strongly with these foundational values.

The introduction of NEP-2020 has, however, also raised new challenges. While the policy envisions libraries as digital hubs providing access to open educational resources, research databases, and institutional repositories, the reality is that many Indian libraries are constrained by inadequate budgets, poor infrastructure, and lack of trained manpower (Sharma & Singh, 2021). This tension between vision and ground realities makes the study of NEP's impact on libraries both timely and necessary.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the opportunities and challenges that NEP-2020 presents for academic libraries and information centres. By integrating older theoretical perspectives and recent research evidence, it provides a balanced and forward-looking view of how libraries can contribute to the successful realization of NEP's goals.

### Literature Review :

Research on the role of libraries in national education policies has shown that libraries are often sidelined in policy discourse despite their critical function. In the Indian context, early scholarship highlighted the infrastructural and professional development gaps in libraries. Ranganathan (1931) and Sinha (1965) laid the foundations for understanding libraries as active agents of social progress, not just book warehouses. Later contributions by international bodies such as IFLA and UNESCO (Häggström, 2004) stressed the role of libraries in promoting information literacy, lifelong learning, and democratic access to information.

In the decades preceding NEP-2020, several studies analyzed the preparedness of Indian academic libraries to deal with globalization, digital transformation, and e-learning demands (Madhusudhan, 2012; Babu & Krishnamurthy, 2013). These studies often noted that while elite institutions like IITs and central universities had invested in digital libraries and e-resources, the majority of state and college libraries remained under-resourced.

Recent scholarship has begun to focus on NEP-2020 specifically. Sharma and Singh (2021) argue that libraries are crucial to NEP's emphasis on multidisciplinary learning because they provide access to cross-disciplinary resources and enable faculty and students to explore diverse knowledge systems. Similarly, Kumar, 2022, **Patil, 2025**, highlights the importance of open educational resources and institutional repositories as aligned with NEP's goals of inclusivity and affordability. A study by Jha (2023) finds that librarians are aware of NEP but often lack training to adapt their services to meet new demands, particularly in digital literacy and research support.

Another emerging strand of literature deals with digital divides and equity issues. The NEP strongly advocates for digital infrastructure, but as Das, 2021, **Das, 2024**, notes, digital readiness in Indian libraries varies widely across rural and urban areas, raising concerns about

equitable implementation. At the same time, scholars such as Mishra (2022) emphasize the potential of libraries to reduce inequities by offering shared digital resources and community spaces.

Thus, the literature shows both continuity with older theories of library science and new empirical challenges posed by NEP-2020. However, there remains a gap in comprehensive studies that integrate these perspectives and analyze both opportunities and challenges systematically—a gap that this paper seeks to address.

### **Conceptual Framework :**

The conceptual framework of this study integrates classical library science theory with contemporary education policy analysis. Ranganathan's Five Laws (1931) provide the normative foundation for library services, emphasizing accessibility, user-centeredness, and adaptability. These principles align with NEP-2020's vision of holistic education and equitable knowledge access.

In addition, information literacy frameworks developed by ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016) are relevant for understanding the skills libraries must impart under NEP. The policy's focus on critical thinking, research, and lifelong learning directly maps onto these frameworks.

Finally, theories of digital transformation and socio-technical systems (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014) offer insights into how libraries must adapt technologically and institutionally to remain relevant. Together, these frameworks guide the analysis of opportunities and challenges that follow.

### **Opportunities for Academic Libraries under NEP-2020 :**

One of the most significant opportunities presented by NEP-2020 is the transformation of libraries into digital and multidisciplinary knowledge hubs. By emphasizing flexible curricula, interdisciplinary study, and research, the policy increases demand for cross-disciplinary resources. Libraries can position themselves as facilitators of this shift by expanding digital collections, subscribing to multidisciplinary databases, and developing institutional repositories (Kumar, 2022).

NEP-2020 also encourages the use of technology for teaching and learning. This opens avenues for libraries to spearhead digital literacy initiatives. Academic librarians can provide training in information retrieval, citation management, research ethics, and use of digital platforms, thereby supporting both students and faculty in becoming digitally literate scholars (Mishra, 2022, Acharya, & Vagdal, 2023).

Another major opportunity is the promotion of open educational resources (OERs). By encouraging the development and dissemination of affordable learning resources, NEP aligns with global trends towards open access. Libraries can play a critical role in curating, cataloguing, and disseminating OERs, ensuring that students from diverse socio-economic

backgrounds have equitable access (Sharma & Singh, 2021, **Magar, 2025**).

Moreover, NEP's emphasis on research and innovation creates opportunities for libraries to expand their role in supporting scholarly communication. Services such as research data management, plagiarism detection, and open access publishing support can be developed. Internationally, libraries have already embraced such roles (Häggström, 2004), and NEP provides the impetus for Indian libraries to follow suit.

Libraries also have the chance to reimagine their physical spaces. NEP advocates for multidisciplinary universities and flexible learning. Libraries can transform into collaborative learning commons with makerspaces, discussion zones, and digital labs that foster creativity and innovation. Such spaces can make libraries central to campus life once again.

### **Challenges for Academic Libraries under NEP-2020 :**

Despite the opportunities, the implementation of NEP-2020 poses significant challenges for academic libraries. The foremost among these is inadequate infrastructure. Many college libraries lack sufficient space, modern equipment, or reliable internet connectivity to support digital learning (Das, 2021). Without infrastructural investment, the vision of digital libraries remains aspirational.

Financial constraints also present a formidable barrier. While NEP emphasizes affordable and inclusive education, library budgets in many institutions have remained stagnant or even declined in real terms (Jha, 2023). Subscribing to databases, maintaining digital platforms, and training staff require sustained funding that is currently unavailable in large parts of the higher education sector.

Another major challenge is the shortage of trained manpower. Librarians often lack professional development opportunities to upgrade their digital competencies. As NEP pushes for advanced services such as research data management, librarians will need specialized skills in areas like metadata, digital preservation, and copyright management (Sharma & Singh, 2021). The absence of systematic training programs limits libraries' ability to deliver these services.

Policy-practice gaps also exist. While NEP-2020 mentions libraries in several contexts, it does not provide detailed implementation guidelines or dedicated funding mechanisms for them. As a result, libraries risk being sidelined unless institutional leaders proactively integrate them into NEP action plans (Kumar, 2022).

Finally, issues of equity and access persist. Digital initiatives risk widening the gap between well-funded institutions and resource-poor colleges. Rural libraries, in particular, face challenges of connectivity, language diversity, and socio-economic barriers. Unless these disparities are addressed, the promise of NEP to democratize education will remain unfulfilled (Mishra, 2022).

**Recommendations :**

To ensure that academic libraries emerge as key enablers of NEP-2020, several recommendations are proposed. First, there must be dedicated funding for library development in institutional and governmental budgets. Without financial investment, digital transformation cannot take place.

Second, professional development programs should be institutionalized. National bodies such as INFLIBNET and UGC can design large-scale training modules to equip librarians with digital, pedagogical, and research-support skills.

Third, libraries should prioritize the creation of institutional repositories and OER platforms. This not only aligns with NEP's inclusivity goals but also enhances institutional visibility and scholarly impact.

Fourth, collaborative consortia should be strengthened to allow resource sharing among institutions. Successful models like INDEST and DELNET can be expanded to ensure that even small colleges benefit from collective bargaining power and access to high-quality resources.

Finally, libraries must actively engage in advocacy within their institutions. Librarians should position themselves as partners in curriculum design, research support, and student learning, ensuring that their services are embedded in NEP implementation at the institutional level.

**Conclusion :**

The National Education Policy 2020 presents both opportunities and challenges for academic libraries and information centres in India. By promoting multidisciplinary education, digital learning, and research, it elevates the strategic importance of libraries. At the same time, infrastructural deficits, financial constraints, and skill shortages hinder libraries from fully realizing this vision.

Drawing from both classical theories of library science and recent empirical research, this paper has shown that libraries can serve as critical enablers of NEP-2020 if they embrace innovation, capacity building, and collaboration. The road ahead requires proactive investment, professional development, and policy integration. If these conditions are met, academic libraries will not only survive but thrive in the NEP era, emerging as central hubs of learning, research, and innovation.

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