



A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Higher Education Institutions in the Context of NEP 2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduced transformative reforms in Indian higher education with the objective of improving quality, accessibility, equity, multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and digital integration. However, the implementation of these reforms varies significantly between rural and urban higher education institutions due to disparities in infrastructure, technological resources, faculty preparedness, and socio-economic conditions. The present study comparatively examines the implementation status, opportunities, and challenges of NEP 2020 in rural and urban higher education institutions in Maharashtra. The study adopted a descriptive survey method involving 200 respondents comprising principals, teachers, and students from selected colleges. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed through percentage analysis, mean scores, and graphical representation. The findings reveal that urban institutions demonstrate higher preparedness in digital learning, multidisciplinary curriculum implementation, and skill-based education, whereas rural institutions face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained faculty, and poor internet connectivity. Nevertheless, rural institutions show strong community participation and inclusive educational approaches. The study concludes that balanced policy support, infrastructure development, and faculty training are essential for equitable implementation of NEP 2020.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Higher Education, Rural Institutions, Urban Institutions, Educational Opportunities, Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as the cornerstone of national development, social transformation, and economic progress. In the modern globalized world, higher education has emerged as a powerful instrument for creating skilled human resources, promoting innovation, fostering research culture, and ensuring sustainable development. In India, the higher education sector has experienced significant expansion over the last few decades. However, issues such as unequal access, quality disparities, outdated curriculum structures, inadequate employability skills, and infrastructural limitations have continued to challenge the system. To address these concerns and align Indian education with global standards and twenty-first-century learning needs, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

NEP 2020 represents a comprehensive and transformative framework aimed at restructuring the Indian education system from foundational learning to higher education. The policy emphasizes multidisciplinary and holistic education, flexibility in curriculum design, skill-based learning, vocational integration, digital education, research and innovation, academic credit banks, and institutional autonomy. It also seeks to increase the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education and promote equity, accessibility, and inclusion for learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Through these reforms, NEP 2020 aims to create a learner-centered educational environment capable of meeting national and global demands.

Despite its progressive vision, the implementation of NEP 2020 presents varying realities across rural and urban higher education institutions. Urban institutions generally possess better infrastructure, digital facilities, internet connectivity, financial resources, and professionally trained faculty members. In contrast, rural institutions often struggle with limited technological access, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified faculty, economic constraints, and socio-cultural barriers affecting students' participation and learning outcomes. These disparities create challenges in ensuring uniform and effective implementation of the policy across different educational contexts.



Therefore, it becomes essential to comparatively examine the status of rural and urban higher education institutions in the context of NEP 2020. The present study aims to analyze the educational opportunities, institutional preparedness, and contextual challenges experienced by these institutions during the implementation process.

2. Need and Significance of the Study

The successful implementation of NEP 2020 depends largely on institutional readiness and contextual adaptability. Rural and urban institutions differ significantly in terms of educational facilities, administrative support, technological infrastructure, and learner diversity.

This study is significant because:

- It identifies disparities between rural and urban higher education institutions.
- It helps policymakers understand ground-level implementation issues.
- It provides insights into infrastructural and technological gaps.
- It contributes to improving equity and accessibility in higher education.
- It suggests practical measures for effective implementation of NEP 2020.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To study the implementation status of NEP 2020 in rural and urban higher education institutions.
2. To compare educational opportunities available in rural and urban institutions.
3. To identify challenges faced during implementation of NEP 2020.
4. To analyze faculty preparedness and technological readiness.
5. To suggest measures for effective implementation of NEP 2020.

4. Research Questions

1. What is the status of NEP 2020 implementation in rural and urban institutions?
2. What educational opportunities are available in both settings?
3. What challenges are faced by rural and urban institutions?
4. Is there any significant difference in technological readiness between rural and urban institutions?

5. Hypothesis of the Study

H₀: There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher education institutions regarding implementation of NEP 2020.

6. Methodology of the Study

6.1 Research Method

The present study adopted the **descriptive survey method** because it enables the researcher to collect information regarding current educational practices, institutional readiness, and challenges associated with NEP 2020 implementation.

6.2 Population

The population of the study consisted of principals, teachers, and students from higher education institutions in Maharashtra.

6.3 Sample

A sample of 200 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling.

Category	Rural Institutions	Urban Institutions	Total
Principals	10	10	20
Teachers	40	40	80
Students	50	50	100
Total	100	100	200

6.4 Tools for Data Collection

The researcher used appropriate research tools to collect reliable and relevant data for the present study. These tools helped in gathering quantitative as well as qualitative information regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 in rural



and urban higher education institutions. The tools selected for the study ensured objectivity, accuracy, and systematic collection of data from respondents.

1. Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was prepared and administered to teachers and students of selected higher education institutions. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended and Likert-scale questions related to infrastructure, digital learning facilities, faculty preparedness, curriculum flexibility, skill-based education, and challenges faced during implementation of NEP 2020. It helped in collecting uniform and measurable responses from respondents.

2. Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was used to collect qualitative information from principals and senior faculty members. It included questions regarding institutional preparedness, administrative support, technological readiness, and implementation challenges of NEP 2020. The interview method provided detailed insights, opinions, and experiences of respondents and helped the researcher understand practical aspects of policy implementation.

The questionnaire consisted of items related to:

- Infrastructure
- Digital learning facilities
- Faculty preparedness
- Curriculum flexibility
- Skill-based education
- Challenges in implementation

6.5 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher personally visited selected rural and urban higher education institutions for collecting data. Prior permission was obtained from the heads of the institutions before conducting the study. Structured questionnaires were distributed among teachers and students, while interviews were conducted with principals and senior faculty members. The respondents were informed about the objectives and importance of the study before data collection. Adequate time was provided for responding to the questionnaire honestly and carefully. The researcher also maintained confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents to ensure unbiased responses. Collected data were systematically organized and classified for further statistical analysis and interpretation.

6.6 Statistical Techniques Used

The collected data were analysed using suitable statistical techniques to obtain meaningful interpretations and conclusions. Percentage analysis was used to classify and compare responses of rural and urban institutions regarding implementation of NEP 2020. Mean scores were calculated to determine the average level of institutional preparedness and educational opportunities. Comparative analysis helped identify differences between rural and urban higher education institutions in terms of infrastructure, digital facilities, and faculty readiness. Graphical representation techniques such as bar graphs and charts were used to present the findings clearly and effectively. These statistical methods helped the researcher analyze the collected data scientifically and systematically.

7. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The collected data were systematically analysed and interpreted according to the objectives of the study. Responses obtained from rural and urban higher education institutions were classified, tabulated, and compared using appropriate statistical techniques. Percentage analysis and mean scores were used to identify differences in infrastructure, digital learning facilities, faculty preparedness, and implementation challenges related to NEP 2020. Graphical representations were also used for better understanding and clear presentation of findings. The analysis helped the researcher draw meaningful conclusions regarding the comparative status of rural and urban institutions in implementing NEP 2020 reforms.

Table 1: Availability of Digital Infrastructure

Institution Type	Adequate Infrastructure	Inadequate Infrastructure
Rural	38	62
Urban	84	16

Interpretation

The table indicates that urban institutions possess better digital infrastructure compared to rural institutions. About 84% of urban institutions reported adequate technological facilities, whereas only 38% of rural institutions possessed sufficient infrastructure.

Table 2: Faculty Preparedness for NEP 2020

Response	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Highly Prepared	24	56
Moderately Prepared	46	34
Poorly Prepared	30	10

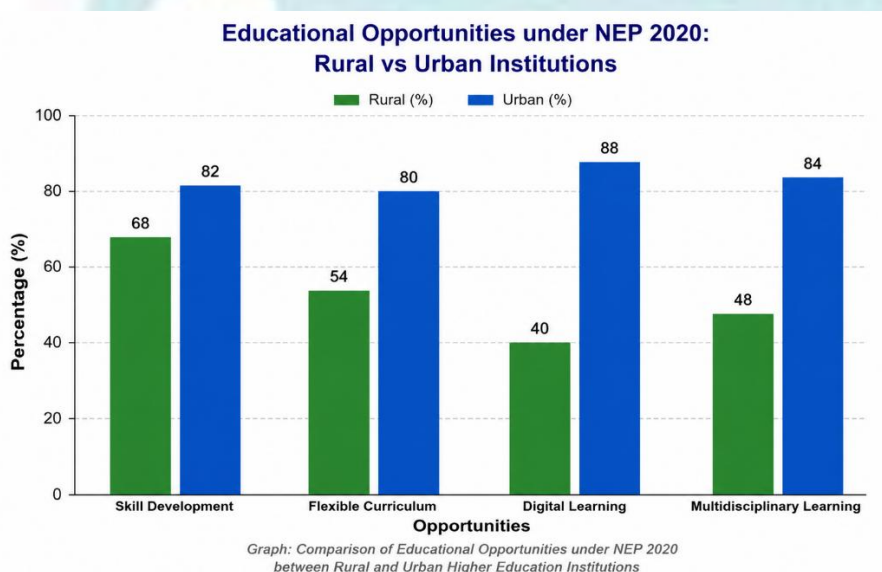
Interpretation

Urban faculty members appear more prepared for implementing NEP 2020 due to better exposure to workshops, ICT training, and institutional support. Rural faculty members require additional training and professional development programs.

Table 3: Opportunities Created by NEP 2020

Opportunities	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Skill Development	68	82
Flexible Curriculum	54	80
Digital Learning	40	88
Multidisciplinary Learning	48	84

Graph 1: Opportunities Created by NEP 2020



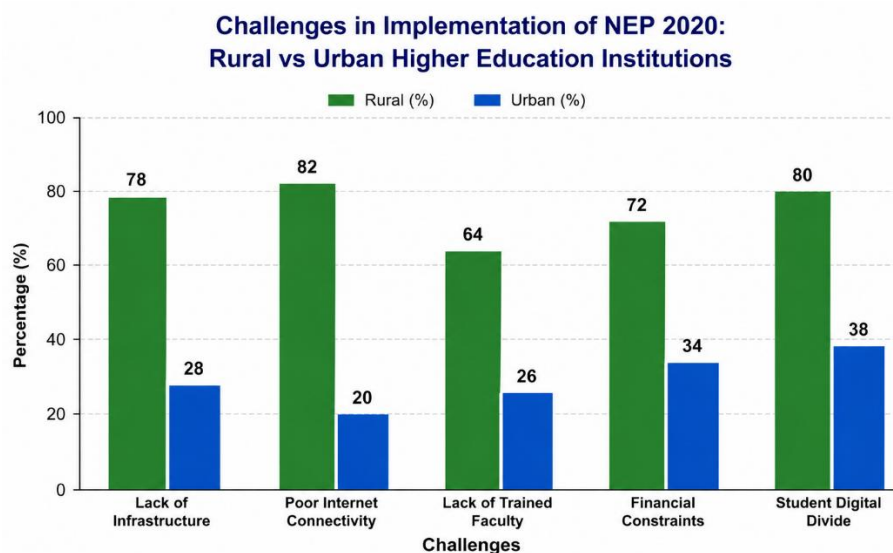
Interpretation

Urban institutions provide greater educational opportunities under NEP 2020 due to technological advancement and curriculum innovation. Rural institutions are gradually adopting these reforms but face infrastructural limitations.

Table 4: Major Challenges Faced During Implementation

Challenges	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Lack of Infrastructure	78	28
Poor Internet Connectivity	82	20
Lack of Trained Faculty	64	26
Financial Constraints	72	34
Student Digital Divide	80	38

Graph 2: Major Challenges Faced During Implementation



Graph: Comparison of Challenges in Implementation of NEP 2020
between Rural and Urban Higher Education Institutions

Interpretation

Rural institutions face severe challenges related to infrastructure, internet connectivity, financial limitations, and digital divide among students. Urban institutions also encounter challenges, but at comparatively lower levels.

8. Hypothesis Analysis

Null Hypothesis (H_0)

“There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher education institutions regarding the implementation of NEP 2020.”

To test the hypothesis, the researcher compared responses collected from rural and urban higher education institutions regarding infrastructure, digital learning facilities, faculty preparedness, curriculum flexibility, and implementation challenges. Percentage analysis and mean score comparison methods were used for data analysis.

The findings revealed considerable differences between rural and urban institutions in terms of technological readiness, internet connectivity, digital learning opportunities, faculty training, and infrastructural facilities. Urban institutions showed higher preparedness and better implementation of NEP 2020 reforms, whereas rural institutions faced significant challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, financial constraints, and limited digital resources.

The comparative analysis clearly indicated that urban institutions achieved higher mean scores in implementation-related aspects compared to rural institutions. Rural colleges demonstrated lower levels of access to digital learning tools, smart classrooms, and trained faculty members.

Therefore, the obtained results did not support the null hypothesis. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between rural and urban higher education institutions regarding the implementation of NEP 2020 was rejected.

Conclusion of Hypothesis Testing

The study concluded that a significant difference exists between rural and urban higher education institutions in the context of NEP 2020 implementation. Urban institutions are comparatively more prepared and resourceful, while rural institutions continue to face infrastructural, technological, and administrative challenges affecting effective implementation of the policy.

9. Major Findings



1. Urban institutions possess better infrastructure, advanced digital facilities, trained faculty, and administrative support, which enable them to implement various provisions of NEP 2020 more effectively and efficiently than rural institutions.
2. Many rural colleges lack adequate classrooms, internet connectivity, computer laboratories, and digital teaching resources, creating major obstacles in implementing technology-oriented reforms and innovative educational practices under NEP 2020.
3. Teachers working in urban institutions receive greater opportunities for workshops, seminars, orientation programs, and professional development activities, enhancing their preparedness and understanding regarding effective implementation of NEP 2020 reforms.
4. Urban colleges provide better access to online learning platforms, smart classrooms, digital libraries, and e-learning resources, enabling students to actively participate in technology-based and flexible learning environments.
5. Limited access to internet services, digital devices, and financial resources creates difficulties for rural students in participating effectively in online learning and skill-based educational activities under NEP 2020.
6. The policy encourages vocational education, flexible curriculum, and multidisciplinary learning approaches, which have positively influenced students and institutions in both rural and urban higher education environments.
7. Several rural higher education institutions experience inadequate funding, limited government assistance, and weak administrative support, which negatively affects infrastructure development and effective implementation of NEP 2020 provisions.

10. Educational Implications

1. The government should improve digital infrastructure and internet facilities in rural higher education institutions for effective NEP 2020 implementation.
2. Regular faculty development and training programs should be organized to enhance teachers' understanding of innovative educational practices and digital learning.
3. Financial assistance and grants should be provided to economically weaker colleges for improving educational facilities and technological resources.
4. Rural students should receive digital literacy and technology-based training to participate effectively in modern learning environments and online education.
5. Equal and inclusive implementation strategies should be developed to reduce educational disparities between rural and urban higher education institutions.
6. Continuous monitoring and administrative support are necessary to ensure successful implementation of NEP 2020 reforms across all higher education institutions.

11. Suggestions

1. Internet connectivity in rural colleges should be improved to support online learning and effective implementation of digital educational initiatives under NEP 2020.
2. Smart classrooms, computer laboratories, and digital learning resources should be provided to enhance teaching-learning processes and technological accessibility in higher education institutions.
3. Regular NEP 2020 orientation and training programs should be organized for teachers, principals, and administrators to improve awareness and implementation efficiency.
4. Government and educational authorities should increase financial support and grants for rural higher education institutions to strengthen infrastructure and academic facilities.
5. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to promote educational development, technological advancement, skill-based education, and institutional capacity-building in higher education.
6. Blended learning approaches combining online and offline teaching methods should be promoted to improve flexibility, accessibility, and quality of education for students.
7. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to ensure proper implementation, accountability, and continuous improvement of NEP 2020 reforms in institutions.

12. Conclusion



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The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative step toward improving higher education in India. However, the implementation process reveals substantial disparities between rural and urban higher education institutions. Urban institutions enjoy advantages such as advanced infrastructure, digital facilities, trained faculty, and institutional autonomy. Rural institutions continue to face infrastructural deficiencies, financial constraints, and technological barriers.

Despite these challenges, rural institutions demonstrate resilience and commitment toward inclusive education. Effective implementation of NEP 2020 requires equitable resource distribution, infrastructural support, policy monitoring, and capacity-building initiatives. Balanced educational development is essential to achieve the broader objectives of NEP 2020 and ensure quality higher education for all sections of society.

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