

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEP 2020 IN UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGES OF MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of four-year undergraduate curricular framework under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a pivotal moment for higher education institutions in India. Although it has been framed to reshape India's higher education landscape, however its implementation has revealed significant challenges across rural and semi-urban regions of India. This study critically examines the operational realities and the gaps between policy design and practical execution of NEP 2020 in twenty-five government-aided degree colleges of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. On the basis of the statistical and empirical data this study identifies the infrastructural, administrative and pedagogical constraints that hinder effective implementation of new policy. It also highlights the limitations in integrating interdisciplinary and research-oriented approaches, as well as restricted academic autonomy and flexibility - prime emphasis of NEP 2020. Thus, the degree colleges of Murshidabad offers important insights into the more general difficulties of putting higher education changes into practice in environments with limited resources.

KEYWORDS: UG Course, Curriculum, Degree Colleges of Murshidabad. Higher Education, Interdisciplinary, Infrastructure & NEP 2020

INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced to reform and reconfigure the entire system of higher education in order to internationalize the Indian education system. To cope with the rapid changes that the world is currently undergoing in the knowledge landscape - particularly in the fields of science, technology, artificial intelligence, and employability - it has become increasingly essential for students to develop creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills. For higher education, NEP 2020 recommends the implementation of a system that recognizes, identifies, and nurtures the unique capabilities of each student. In addition, institutions must ensure that education is inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, multidisciplinary, integrated, and holistic, with a highly flexible course structure. The policy places greater emphasis on conceptual understanding, creativity and critical thinking, ethics and human values, life skills, extensive use of technology, equity and inclusion, and excellence in research (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, implementing all these elements in higher education institutions remains a major challenge across India - particularly in semi-urban areas, newly established colleges, and underdeveloped institutions. Most colleges either lack sufficient manpower or adequate infrastructure to implement NEP 2020 in a full-fledged manner

and achieve its broader goals (Shamsu, 2021). Concerns have also been raised regarding how these institutions will achieve the policy's overarching objectives by 2040 and how they will manage the NEP framework in the interim.

In this context, the condition of higher educational institutions in Murshidabad - particularly the government-aided degree colleges - appears rather concerning. Demographically, Murshidabad is among the most densely populated districts in West Bengal and remains historically marginalized, characterized by comparatively lower educational attainment, socio-economic vulnerability, and inadequate development of higher education infrastructure. The undergraduate colleges in this district primarily serve rural and minority populations with low income levels and limited technological exposure (Musharuddin, 2022). At present, twenty-five government-aided degree colleges, along with a newly established university (Murshidabad University), are operating under the NEP 2020 course structure since 2023, affiliated with the University of Kalyani. Over the past five years, these institutions have enrolled more than forty-five thousand students annually (University of Kalyani, 2025), which has resulted in severe overcrowding and an increased administrative burden on college authorities. It is unfortunate that, while most other districts in West Bengal host more than one university, Murshidabad - despite its large

population - continues to lag behind in this regard. Consequently, the implementation of NEP 2020 in the degree colleges of Murshidabad, particularly in its rural areas, appears to have been introduced abruptly, without sufficient preparatory groundwork.

Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been formally implemented, a considerable gap remains between its policy framework and practical execution. To address these disparities, the present study adopts a grounded, district-level perspective to examine how the objectives of NEP 2020 are interpreted and experienced within undergraduate colleges in Murshidabad. The findings are intended to contribute to the broader national discourse on achieving equitable and effective policy implementation. Given Murshidabad's persistent educational and developmental deficits, the district provides a valuable case for analysing the practical challenges of policy rollout within socio-economically constrained contexts. Furthermore, Murshidabad was selected as the study site because a single-district focus ensures logistical feasibility in terms of data access, field visits, and empirical observation, while allowing for more rigorous qualitative analysis within the available time and resources.

OBJECTIVES

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze the implications of the new admission pattern and the initial outcomes of NEP 2020 in undergraduate colleges of Murshidabad.
2. To examine the institutional strategies adopted by colleges to manage student congestion and course administration under NEP 2020.
3. To identify the constraints affecting curricular flexibility and the implementation of interdisciplinary approaches in the colleges.
4. To evaluate the extent of academic autonomy exercised by the degree colleges in Murshidabad.
5. To assess the impact of infrastructural limitations on the overall functioning of degree colleges in the district.
6. To examine the adequacy of teaching and non-teaching personnel and its influence on the effective implementation of NEP 2020 programs.
7. To analyze the scope and institutional environment for research and innovation activities within the colleges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is considered one of the most significant educational reforms since

India's Independence, multiple scholars have noted that the success of policy shifts depends not merely on the content of the reforms but also on their enactment within specific institutional and socio-economic contexts. Accordingly, this literature review synthesizes key strands of research to situate the implementation of NEP 2020 in the undergraduate colleges of Murshidabad district, identifying both the theoretical frameworks and the knowledge gaps that justify this inquiry. Existing studies have primarily examined NEP implementation at national or state levels; therefore, a district-level microstudy of Murshidabad addresses a crucial research gap by illustrating how local socio-economic conditions influence the policy's operationalization.

Existing literature highlights that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to restructure undergraduate programs into flexible four-year models with multiple entry and exit points, introduce an Academic Credit Bank (ACB), redesign assessment norms, and enhance institutional autonomy (Abhinandan et al., 2024). Several studies analyzing the policy text indicate a strong alignment with global higher education reforms - particularly in promoting learner-centred pedagogy, research-integrated curricula, and digital learning environments (Ajay & Sundeep, 2020).

Research further emphasizes the policy's intent to enhance quality through faculty development, accreditation reforms, and the restructuring of affiliating universities to reduce administrative burdens on colleges (Talari et al., 2023). Despite these initiatives, numerous scholars point out that implementation feasibility remains uneven across regions. Inadequate infrastructure, regulatory complexities, and resource constraints - especially in rural and semi-urban colleges - raise concerns about whether the policy's transformative goals can be realized uniformly (Deepak, 2025). Empirical studies emerging after 2020 provide mixed evidence regarding progress. National and state-level reports largely document policy dissemination through curriculum circulars, orientation programs, and institutional planning documents.

Despite increasing scholarship on NEP 2020, notable gaps remain:

1. Scarcity of district-specific empirical evidence, particularly from socio-economically disadvantaged districts like Murshidabad.
2. Limited focus on undergraduate colleges that function under strict affiliation systems.
3. Lack of actor-centric studies capturing detailed experiences of faculty, administrators, and students.
4. Minimal research connecting policy intentions with institutional capacity and community contexts.

DATA & METHODOLOGY

A variety of statistical data were collected from twenty-five degree colleges in Murshidabad district. The primary data were obtained from the *Self-Study Reports (SSR)* submitted by these colleges to the National Assessment and Accreditation Council

Higher Education (AISHE), the *National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)*, and publications from the Ministry of Higher Education. Relevant secondary data were also reviewed from scholarly articles and research papers.

The present study employs a mixed-method research design combining both descriptive and analytical approaches. The

Table 1 DETAILS OF BASIC INFORMATION OF THE UG DEGREE COLLEGES OF MURSHIDABAD: 2023-2024

Name of the colleges	Total no. of Dept.	Total no. of admitted students ^{.....> NEP :- 2022}	Total strength of college students	Total no. of graduated students (Progressed & Placed)	Total no. of class room	No. of Digital/ICT enabled Class Room	Total no. of teaching faculties	Total no. of office staff (Permanent & ^{Co-req't})	Per Teacher - Students ratio	Total no. of computer for library	Total no. of library books
Berhampore Girls' College	18	875	3562	708 (37%)	51	22	105	12+4	33.92	116	42222
Berhampore College	11	3886	6235	536 (14 %)	34	03	53	10	117.6	31	27000
Domkal Girls' College	09	1037	4271	327 (12 %)	21	06	31+3	16+5	137.8	13	3841
Dukhul Nibaran Chandra College	18	1862	4196	239 (17%)	33	07	76	7+2	55.21	30	25000
Dumkal College	15	1097	3347	468 (7%)	23	03	46	12+6	72.76	67	13225
Hazi A.K. Khan College	10	629	1467	232 (12%)	26	03	32	7+1	45.84	25	8714
Jalangi Mahavidyalaya	09	723	1950	7%	25	02	28	7+8	69.64	04	3247
Jangipur College	18	4274	9076	647(11%)	42	10	65	9+13	139.6	48	24494
Jatindra Rajendra Mahavidyalaya	08	1775	3516	165 (5.6%)	31	02	25	10+4	140	02	27000
Kandi Raj College	19	1687	2932	353 (11%)	51	03	104	12+14	28.19	50	19230
Krishnath College	20	2145	6464	895 (14%)	52	08	106	9+19	60.98	46	47000
Lalgola College	10	1662	3610	145 (8%)	08	03	33	5+5	109.4	18	10000
Murshidabad Adarsha Mahavidyalaya	08	1968	4200	650 (9%)	16	03	27	5+3	155.6	15	32318
Muzaffar Ahmed Mahavidyalaya	10	1622	2970	7%	14	02	32	11	92.8	08	20000
Nabagram A. C. K. College	08	768	4015	89 (8%)	05	01	20	3	200	16	2000
Nagar College	15	1031	1685	9%	23	07	54	14+3	31.2	50	14029
N Mohammad Smriti Mahavidyalaya	07	1987	3854	120 (7%)	08	01	23	5+8	167.6	02	9333
Panchthupi H. G. College	07	406	681	176 (5%)	20	02	26	6	26.1	07	7332
Prof. Syed Nurul Hasan College	11	1597	2619	9%	34	04	64	10	43.57	20	13500
Raja Birendra Chandra College	11	742	1751	149 (14%)	18	01	37	6+5	42	20	10564
Rani Dhanya Kumari College	13	1577	2480	164 (11%)	15	02	36	7	60.1	29	11000
S.R. Fatepuria College	15	3500	6709	283 (7%)	33	02	62	6+8	108.2	45	42315
Sagardighi K. K. S. Mahavidyalaya	11	664	1024	68 (9%)	15	02	28	10	36.57	06	6000
Sripat Singh College	17	3210	4637	546 (14%)	51	05	89	17+7	52.1	48	34000
S. C. B. Centenary College	10	1550	3428	(11%)	29	02	48	8+9	71.41	10	20000
Total numbers /% are	308	42247	90679	App.10%	678	106	1219	348	74.38	726	473364

Source: The table is prepared on the basis of SSR & Official notifications of the colleges.

(NAAC) during 2023 and 2024 (National Assessment and Accreditation Council, n.d.). These reports include detailed statistics on departments, faculty members, students, non-teaching staff, regular and smart classrooms, library collections, computer facilities, department-wise enrolment, teacher-student ratios, and pass and placement percentages. Additional information was gathered from the official websites of the colleges and through direct communication with institutional authorities. Field visits were also conducted to several colleges, where discussions with administrators provided empirical insights into curriculum restructuring and flexibility, the adoption of multidisciplinary and skill-based courses, assessment methods, the use of ICT and digital resources, and student feedback and progression. Enrolment and examination-related data were collected from the Controller of Examinations, University of Kalyani. Supplementary information was drawn from government reports, including the *All India Survey on*

descriptive component aims to document the extent to which the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have been implemented in the degree colleges of Murshidabad. The analytical component seeks to examine the relationship between the theoretical provisions of NEP 2020 and their practical execution, as well as the factors influencing effective implementation. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives. Quantitative tools were applied to assess students' awareness, perceived curriculum relevance, engagement, and employability. They were also utilized to analyze faculty responses, research-oriented activities, and academic achievements, as well as to evaluate student support and progression, laboratory and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities, library resources, and administrative backing for NEP initiatives. Qualitative tools were employed to gather insights from principals and faculty members regarding

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institutional challenges, best practices, and the gap between theoretical expectations and actual practices. They were further used to assess the extent to which teaching–learning processes align with NEP recommendations, including activity-based

learning, interdisciplinarity, and curricular flexibility.

This study is distinctive as it offers one of the first localized empirical examinations of the functioning of NEP 2020 in the

Table 2: DETAILS OF DEPARTMENT WISE TEACHERS IN THE FACULTIES OF ARTS- 2023

College Name	Bengali (permanent Casual)	English	History	Education	Political Science	Philosophy	Sociology	Geography	Physical Education	Economics	Sanskrit	Arabic
Berhampore Girls' College	7+2	7	5	ND	7	3	6	3	3 + 1	3	5	ND
Berhampore College	5	6	4	ND	6	5	ND	3	ND	4	5	ND
Domkal Girls' College	5	4	5	7	4	2	2	1	1	ND	ND	ND
D. N. C. College	4	4	4	9	3	4	ND	5	2	1	4	2
Dumkal College	5	4	5	ND	3	3	ND	6	2	1	1	ND
Hazi A.K. Khan College	4	3	5	5	1	5	ND	3	1	ND	1	3
Jalangi Mahavidyalaya	5	4	5	2	4	4	ND	2	2	ND	0	ND
Jangipur College	8	5	5	0	5	4	ND	5	ND	2	4	1
J. R. Mahavidyalaya	2	4	4	2	3	4	ND	ND	ND	ND	3	3
Kandi Raj College	5	5	5	4	6	5	0	4	3	3	4	ND
Krishnath College	7	8	8	2	5	6	2	3	3	2	8	ND
Lalgola College	4	4	5	4	4	3	ND	2	1	ND	2	4
Murshidabad Adarsha Mahavidyalaya	6	3	3	3	5	3	ND	4	0	ND	ND	ND
Muzaffar Ahmed Mahavidyalaya	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	ND	ND	3	1
Nabagram A. C. K. College	3	3	5	2	4	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	2	1
Nagar College	6	6	6	2	4	7	ND	5	2	1	5	5
N. Mohammad Smriti Mahavidyalaya	5	4	3	4	ND	1	5	ND	ND	ND	ND	1
Panchthupi H. G. College	6	4	4	ND	3	4	ND	ND	ND	ND	4	ND
Prof. S. Nurul Hasan College	9	9	9	6	10	3	5	8	2	2	ND	3
Raja Birendra Chandra College	6	4	5	2	2	1	ND	3	3	ND	7	ND
Rani Dhanya Kumari College	3	4	3	3	4	0	2	3	3	1	1	ND
S.R. Fatepuria College	9	5	4	3	7	5	ND	4	3	4	2	3
Sagardighi K. K.S. Mahavidyalaya	4	4	3	2	3	4	ND	ND	ND	ND	3	2
Sripat Singh College	10	7	5	ND	7	4	ND	4	2	3	6	ND
S. C. B. Centenary College	6	5	7	6	3	5	ND	6	1	ND	6	3

ND stands for no department.

Source: The table is prepared on the basis of SSR & Official notifications of the colleges

Table.3: DETAILS OF DEPARTMENT WISE TEACHERS IN THE FACULTIES OF SCIENCE & COMMERCE- 2023

College Name	Math & Statistic	Physics	Chemistry	Computer	Botany	Zoology	Physiology	Commerce	Film St./DS/Tour	ENVS	Library Sc.	Sericulture	Micro bio
Berhampore Girls' College	6	8	7	3	6	7	10	ND	ND	5	ND	ND	ND
Berhampore College	6	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	5	1	ND	ND	ND	ND
D. N. C. College	3	3	4	ND	2	6	ND	6	ND	1	ND	ND	ND
Dumkal College	2	3	6	1	ND	ND	ND	3	ND	1	ND	ND	ND
Jangipur College	3	4	6	ND	3	5	ND	4	ND	0	1	ND	ND
Kandi Raj College	4	5	8	1	2	2	3	ND	ND	1	ND	ND	ND
Krishnath College	6	10	8	ND	7	8	9	ND	1	0	ND	3	ND
Nagar College	4	0	ND	1	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Raja Birendra Chandra College	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	3	ND	1	ND	ND	ND
Rani Dhanya Kumari College	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	6	3	ND	ND	ND	ND
S.R. Fatepuria College	2	6	2	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	3	ND	ND	ND
Sagardighi K.K.S. Mahavidyalaya	1	1	1	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Sripat Singh College	4	8	7	2	6	7	ND	ND	ND	2	ND	ND	5
Prof. S. Nurul Hasan College	1	ND	ND	1	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND

Source: The table is prepared on the basis of SSR & Official notifications of the colleges

degree colleges of Murshidabad district. Unlike broader policy analyses, it focuses on the ground realities of implementation, highlighting how the ideals of NEP 2020 - such as flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and skill-based education - are translated into everyday academic practice. Moreover, it critically analyses the "theory-practice gap," which is rarely explored in policy implementation research.

FINDINGS

The names of the departments under the faculties of Arts, Science, and Commerce, along with the number of faculty members, are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Fourteen colleges in Murshidabad offer programs in both Arts and Science, while six institutions have Commerce faculties. However, only three

very few teachers and limited classroom space. Dividing these students into multiple sections is not feasible due to shortages of both space and staff. Consequently, offering Multidisciplinary Courses (MDCs) as required under NEP 2020 poses significant challenges. Most colleges cope with this situation by accommodating only a fraction of students at a time, as regular attendance averages merely 20–30%, which inadvertently prevents the complete collapse of the teaching–learning process.

The empirical evidence indicates that most of these colleges face significant barriers to adopting an interdisciplinary approach. Many are purely Arts colleges with limited course options and large student enrolments. Students generally have minimal flexibility in selecting minor subjects, as course combinations are predetermined by the institutions.

Table 4 : DEPARTMENT WISE LOAD OF STUDENTS– SANCTIONED & ADMITTED UNDER NEP IN 2023

College Name	Bengali	History	Education	Pol. Sci.	English	Philosophy	Sanskrit	Geography								
M. Adarsha Mahavidyalaya	732	600	681	487	648	336	648	343	213	79	546	64	ND	136	38	
Domkal Girls College	550	239	630	260	550	186	500	152	300	100	120	37	ND	150	58	
Janjipur College	747	711	747	652	ND	758	726	742	367	764	597	641	276	680	205	
Domkal College	322	236	303	210	ND	289	192	322	128	135	95	ND	183	103		
H. A. K. K. College	353	235	385	291	355	227	170	89	50	23	50	19	ND	50	00	
J. R. Mahavidyalaya	946	558	913	497	629	361	545	184	250	86	403	67	170	2	ND	
Lalgola College	346	315	435	407	346	344	277	275	325	63	325	113	ND	33	14	
R. B. C. College	434	351	223	119	200	53	138	56	203	85	100	29	110	14	66	11
N. A. C. K. College	295	287	295	277	295	267	295	65	295	30	ND	25	10	ND		
N. M. S. Mahavidyalaya	700	569	700	507	754	750	ND	250	80	150	29	ND	ND	ND		
S.R. Fatepuria College	1218	910	1218	905	600	287	1218	729	250	114	300	73	50	16	250	69

Source: The table is prepared on the basis of SSR & Official notifications of the colleges

colleges - Berhampore College, D. N. C. College, and Jangipur College - currently operate active Commerce departments due to low student enrolment. Eleven of the twenty-five-degree colleges are exclusively Arts institutions. In most departments, the number of faculty members is either very low or inadequate to meet academic requirements. Several departments do not have any permanent teachers and are instead managed by **State Aided College Teachers (SACTs)** on a contractual basis.

The subject-wise intake and the number of students admitted under NEP 2020 during the academic year 2023–2024, primarily in the Arts stream, are presented in Table 4. The admission capacities of certain departments - such as Bengali, History, Political Science, and Education - are exceptionally high, often exceeding the total student strength of several reputable metropolitan colleges in India. The figures shown include only the number of students admitted to the first semester; students admitted to the third and fifth semesters are not included in this count. Typically, between 500 and 1,100 students are enrolled in each of these departments at any given time.

More than fifteen of the twenty-five-degree colleges in Murshidabad face severe overcrowding, with departments accommodating between 200 and 750 students despite having

opportunities for cross-disciplinary selection - such as Arts students opting for Science subjects - are virtually non-existent due to the scarcity of Science programs in the district. Consequently, these structural constraints substantially hinder the effective implementation of NEP 2020.

The university-prescribed syllabus is largely superimposed on affiliated colleges, making its effective delivery challenging. These curricula are typically designed with the faculty standards and academic environment of the university in mind, often disregarding the contextual realities and resource limitations of the affiliated colleges. Moreover, college faculty members have little to no scope to adapt the syllabus or individual papers to the needs, interests, or capacities of their institutions. Universities frequently introduce new papers in an effort to incorporate standardized and skill-based knowledge; however, these papers often fall outside the specialization areas of existing college faculty members. As a result, many colleges lack the requisite expertise to effectively teach the newly introduced components of the curriculum.

Teachers and students have very limited access to facilities or opportunities for research-oriented study. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places strong emphasis on promoting research and innovation among college faculty and

students; however, in practice, most institutions in Murshidabad lack the necessary research infrastructure to support such initiatives. Only one or two colleges possess even basic facilities for research activities. Under the four-year undergraduate program mandated by NEP 2020, the final year has been designated for research work, yet there are no clear guidelines on how this component should be implemented. Most colleges lack both adequate infrastructure and qualified faculty to guide research effectively. Fewer than 25% of teachers hold doctoral or M.Phil. degrees, which further constrains the ability of institutions to foster a research-oriented academic environment.

Table 5: RESEARCH EXPERIENCED FACULTIES IN THE DEGREE COLLEGES OF MURSHIDABAD

Name of the college	Total No. of faculties	No. of faculties having Ph. D.	Percentage of researched experienced faculties
Murshidabad Adarsha Mahavidyalaya	28	5	17.85%
Domkal College	46	8	17.39%
Domkal Girl's College	31	5	16.12%
Hazi A. K. Khan College	31	9	29%
Lalgola College	33	8	24.24%
Sripat Song College	91	28	30.76%
Berhampore College	50	7	14%
Berhampore Girls College	104	30	28.84%
R.B.C. College	37	7	18.91%
S. R. F. College	62	17	30.76%
Jangipur College	65	20	30.76%
S. K. K. S.	28	7	25%
Mahavidyalaya			
Nabagram A. C. K. College	20	3	15%
Nagar College	54	4	7.40%
D.N.C. College	67	13	19.40%
R. D. K. College	36	7	19.44%
N. M. S. Mahavidyalaya	23	6	26%
Panchthupi H. G. College	25	4	16%
Jalangi Mahavidyalaya	28	3	10.71%
J. R. Mahavidyalaya	25	3	12%
K. N. College	106	37	34.90%
S. C. B. C College	49	11	22.44%
Total percentage of researched experienced teachers	1039	242	23.22%

Source: The table is prepared on the basis of SSR & Official notifications of the colleges

Research opportunities in the colleges are extremely limited for several reasons. Although digital textbooks, e-content, and other resources are available through platforms such as the *Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA)* and *INFLIBNET*, the majority of teachers and students seldom use these resources, primarily due to language barriers associated with English-medium content. Most college libraries maintain only basic textbook collections, with a few possessing small and selectively curated reference sections that are inadequate to support meaningful research activities. Furthermore, there is no institutional provision or funding mechanism to promote research within these colleges. Most concerningly, college

teachers holding Ph.D. degrees - particularly those affiliated with the University of Kalyani - are not permitted to undertake independent research, further limiting the development of a research culture in the district's higher education institutions.

DISCUSSION

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aspires to transform higher education in India by promoting multidisciplinary and holistic learning, emphasizing flexibility, and fostering research and innovation (Shamsu, 2025). However, the empirical findings of this study reveal that the majority of degree colleges in Murshidabad possess only a nominal and limited capacity to implement these changes effectively. The adoption of multidisciplinary courses, flexible curriculum options such as the Multi-Entry, Multi-Exit (MEME) system, and the integration of research and skill development programs remain largely unachieved. Most colleges in the district offer only Arts programs, typically with seven or eight core departments. There are no opportunities for students from the Science stream to take Arts courses or vice versa, thus limiting the interdisciplinary intent of NEP 2020.

In terms of skill development and employability, a few colleges have attempted to integrate skill-based training and career-oriented modules into their curricula. However, the absence of internships, job fairs, and campus placement programs severely restricts the employability outcomes envisioned by NEP 2020. With the exception of one or two institutions, degree colleges in Murshidabad continue to exhibit low overall performance levels. Among the twenty-three colleges evaluated by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), only Berhampore Girls' College has received an 'A' grade, while the rest have been accredited with 'B', 'B+', or 'C' grades (National Assessment and Accreditation Council, n.d.). These accreditation results clearly highlight the structural weaknesses and systemic challenges facing higher education in the district, underscoring that most colleges are not adequately positioned to fully implement NEP 2020.

The study further observes that digital infrastructure and related resources are highly inadequate across the district's colleges, impeding the practical realization of NEP's course framework. The shortage of qualified teaching and non-teaching staff remains one of the most critical obstacles to effective implementation. The small number of available teachers are compelled to manage disproportionately large student populations, leaving little room for innovative pedagogy or research engagement. Moreover, the acute shortage of non-teaching staff further burdens faculty members, who are often required to undertake administrative duties, reducing their time for academic and creative activities.

At the national level, India seeks to achieve international academic credibility through the implementation of NEP 2020 (Verma, 2025). The internationalization of higher education is aimed at enhancing quality, aligning curricula with global standards, fostering employability, and producing globally competent citizens who are knowledgeable, skilled, and culturally sensitive (Mondal, 2024). However, within this broader reform landscape, the degree colleges of Murshidabad remain far behind. The majority of institutions primarily function as centres for conducting university examinations and distributing scholarships, rather than as vibrant academic spaces. Except for a few urban colleges, irregular classes, limited extracurricular engagement, and the absence of a student-centric learning environment are common features.

This situation has not emerged from administrative indifference or faculty apathy but rather from structural constraints such as the overwhelming student population, inadequate teaching and non-teaching staff, and insufficient physical infrastructure. Despite these challenges, every college has formally adopted - or, more accurately, has been compelled to adopt - the NEP 2020 framework since 2023. In practice, these institutions are facing greater difficulties than under the previous Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). Owing to limited human and infrastructural resources, most colleges have been forced to modify or simplify the NEP structure to suit their circumstances, thereby compromising the policy's core objectives. Nevertheless, they have little choice but to comply with governmental directives. This is the common scenario of all the rural or semi urban colleges of India (Nagamani et al.,).

The fragile implementation of NEP 2020 has, in many instances, demotivated rather than inspired students. While the policy has contributed to an increase in higher educational enrolment rates, students in rural areas are increasingly losing confidence in the value of their degrees for future employability. This is largely attributed to compromised evaluation and examination procedures. Given the large number of students, colleges often resort to lenient or simplified assessment methods. For many institutions, conducting offline examinations in accordance with standard procedures has become nearly impossible due to the shortage of teaching staff, administrative personnel, and classroom space. Some colleges have attempted to implement online internal evaluations, but insufficient digital infrastructure has undermined both fairness and reliability.

Moreover, when project work is used as a component of evaluation without oral examinations (*viva voce*), the process fails to distinguish between high- and low-performing students, leading to academic demotivation. Over time, this has caused even diligent students to adopt a more casual approach to their

studies. This situation demands urgent attention if the intellectual potential of rural India is to be preserved.

Finally, while digital learning has been widely promoted under NEP 2020, its effects in the rural colleges of Murshidabad have been largely counterproductive. Instead of fostering independent learning and discipline, the excessive reliance on digital modes has eroded students' reading habits and patience. The growing dependence on online materials, often accompanied by unethical shortcuts, is undermining the moral and educational foundations of the learning process. Consequently, the goals of fostering critical thinking, ethical awareness, and holistic development are being compromised, calling for a more context-sensitive and ethically grounded approach to digital education in rural higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that despite the visionary intent of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, its implementation in the degree colleges of Murshidabad remains severely constrained by structural, infrastructural, and human resource limitations. The findings indicate that colleges in the district face acute shortages of faculty, non-teaching staff, and classroom space, which hinder the realization of NEP's goals of flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and research orientation. To address these challenges, the government must urgently assess and categorize colleges according to their infrastructural capacity and student strength, ensuring that policy application is contextually appropriate rather than uniform. Admission limits should be rationalized to allow for individualized student attention, while additional funding must be directed toward strengthening ICT-enabled teaching facilities and expanding institutional infrastructure. Filling vacant teaching and non-teaching positions and creating new posts are also imperative to sustain the growing student population. Furthermore, colleges should be granted greater curricular autonomy to adapt syllabi to local contexts, supported by effective coordination among government bodies, universities, and institutional authorities. Adequate preparation time must be provided before introducing new courses, and faculty should receive both encouragement and resources to develop relevant study materials. Equally vital is the promotion of research culture through the establishment of research-friendly infrastructure in rural and semi-urban colleges and by offering faculty development and field-based training programs to improve pedagogical quality. Lastly, agencies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) should transition from a purely regulatory role to one that is supportive and facilitative, helping institutions evolve toward excellence. Ultimately, the successful realization of NEP 2020 in Murshidabad's degree colleges depends on systemic reforms,

sustained investment, and collaborative governance that align national aspirations with local educational realities.

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