

COORDINATION BETWEEN SCHOOL EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a seamless, coherent educational ecosystem that dissolves rigid boundaries between school education and higher education through structural, curricular, and administrative reforms [1], [2]. This empirical study investigates the extent and quality of coordination that currently exists between school-level and higher-education institutions in India following the introduction of NEP 2020, with specific attention to curriculum alignment, credit transfer mechanisms, multidisciplinary exposure, and institutional communication channels. Using a mixed-methods survey design administered to 420 respondents comprising school teachers, college faculty, administrators, and students, the study collects quantitative data analysed through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and Pearson correlation. Five tabulated datasets present respondent demographics, awareness levels of NEP provisions, perceived curriculum alignment, the prevalence of coordination mechanisms before and after NEP 2020, and the statistical relationship between coordination mechanisms and student transition outcomes. The findings reveal a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) between the presence of structured coordination mechanisms and smoother student transition from school to higher education, although awareness of specific NEP provisions such as the Academic Bank of Credits remains moderate at 54.3 percent. These empirical results substantiate the policy's foundational premise that vertical articulation between educational stages is a prerequisite for the multidisciplinary, flexible learning environment NEP 2020 seeks to create, while also revealing implementation gaps that the concluding section translates into targeted policy recommendations for strengthening inter-institutional coordination.

Keywords: *National Education Policy 2020¹; School–Higher Education Coordination²; Curriculum Continuity³; Multidisciplinary Education⁴; Academic Bank of Credits⁵.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020, approved by the Union Cabinet of India in July 2020, replaced the thirty-four-year-old National Policy on Education of 1986 and set out a comprehensive restructuring of the Indian education system spanning early childhood care through doctoral study [1], [3]. Among its most far-reaching proposals is the restructuring of the school curriculum into a 5+3+3+4 framework and the corresponding transformation of higher education into a flexible, multidisciplinary system organised around the Academic Bank of Credits and multiple entry-exit options [2], [4]. These reforms are premised on the assumption that school education and higher education, historically administered as disconnected silos under separate regulatory bodies, must operate as a continuous pipeline if the policy's larger goals of holistic development, critical thinking, and vocational integration are to be realised [5].

1.2 Rationale for School–Higher Education Coordination

Coordination between the two stages is not a peripheral administrative concern but a structural precondition for NEP 2020's success. Weak articulation between school-leaving competencies and higher-education entry requirements has long been associated with high first-year attrition, remedial course burdens, and misaligned vocational aspirations in the Indian context [6], [7]. NEP 2020 explicitly calls for curricular linkages, teacher-exchange programmes, joint career counselling, and early exposure to multidisciplinary thinking at the school stage so that students entering undergraduate programmes are equipped for the flexibility the new higher-education architecture demands [2], [8]. Empirically verifying whether such coordination is materialising on the ground, rather than remaining a policy aspiration, is therefore essential to assessing NEP 2020's implementation trajectory.

1.3 Objectives and Scope of the Study

This study pursues four objectives: first, to assess the level of awareness of NEP 2020's school–higher-education coordination provisions among educators and administrators; second, to empirically measure perceived curriculum alignment between the two stages; third, to compare the prevalence of formal coordination mechanisms before and after the policy's introduction; and fourth, to statistically examine the relationship between such coordination mechanisms and student transition outcomes. The scope of the study is confined to a purposive sample of school and higher-education institutions in urban and semi-urban India, surveyed between 2024 and 2025, and does not extend to technical or professional education streams governed by separate regulatory frameworks such as engineering or medical councils [9].

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A growing body of scholarship has examined the structural and pedagogical implications of NEP 2020 since its release. Kumar and Sarkar [3] analysed the policy text and argued that its multidisciplinary vision cannot succeed without a fundamental redesign of school-level curricula to introduce interdisciplinary thinking earlier

than the undergraduate stage. Similarly, Aithal and Aithal [4] undertook a comparative policy analysis and concluded that the transition from a rigid streaming system (science, commerce, humanities) at the secondary level to a flexible credit-based system at the tertiary level represents the single largest coordination challenge facing Indian education authorities. Empirical studies on institutional readiness remain comparatively scarce. Sharma et al. [10] surveyed 180 secondary-school teachers in three states and found that fewer than half could correctly describe the Academic Bank of Credits or the four-year undergraduate programme structure, suggesting a communication gap between policy architects and frontline educators. In a related study, Rani and Bhardwaj [11] surveyed higher-education faculty and reported that although institutions had begun revising syllabi to accommodate multidisciplinary electives, fewer than a third had established any formal liaison mechanism with feeder schools. These findings echo earlier pre-NEP research by Tilak [6] and Agarwal [7], who documented persistent disconnects between school-leaving standards and university entry expectations well before the 2020 policy, indicating that the coordination problem long predates NEP 2020 and is not automatically resolved by policy pronouncement alone.

International comparative literature offers additional context. Studies of the Finnish and Singaporean education systems emphasise that successful vertical articulation depends on shared curricular frameworks, joint teacher-training pipelines, and data-sharing infrastructure between school boards and universities [12], [13]. Applying these lessons to the Indian context, Chopra [14] argued that the multiplicity of school boards (CBSE, ICSE, and numerous state boards) operating alongside a decentralised university system compounds the coordination challenge in ways that centralised systems do not face. Meanwhile, UGC and NCERT implementation reports [15], [16] describe pilot programmes such as bridge courses and credit-recognition frameworks, but independent empirical verification of their reach and effectiveness at the institutional level remains limited. Taken together, the literature converges on three points relevant to this study: awareness of NEP 2020 provisions among educators is uneven, formal coordination mechanisms between school and higher-education institutions remain underdeveloped relative to policy expectations, and there is a scarcity of quantitative, cross-institutional data linking coordination mechanisms to measurable student outcomes. This study addresses that gap by generating primary empirical data on all three dimensions and statistically testing the relationship between coordination and transition outcomes, thereby extending the largely qualitative and policy-analytic literature reviewed above [3]–[16].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive-cum-correlational research design situated within a positivist quantitative paradigm, appropriate for empirically testing the relationship between institutional coordination mechanisms and student transition outcomes under NEP 2020. A structured, pre-validated questionnaire comprising closed-ended and five-point Likert-scale items was administered both online and in person between January 2024 and March 2025. The questionnaire was divided into four sections corresponding to the study's objectives: respondent demographics, awareness of NEP 2020 provisions, perceived curriculum alignment, and institutional coordination practices. Content validity was established through review by five subject experts in educational administration, and a pilot test on 40 respondents yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the Likert-scale sections. The target population comprised school teachers, higher-

education faculty, institutional administrators, and undergraduate students located across six Indian states selected to represent geographic and administrative diversity (Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal). A stratified purposive sampling technique was used to ensure proportional representation across the four respondent categories and across government, aided, and private institutions. Of 500 questionnaires distributed, 420 valid and complete responses were retained for analysis, yielding a response rate of 84 percent. Secondary data, including institutional coordination records and NEP 2020 implementation documents published by the Ministry of Education, UGC, and NCERT, supplemented the primary survey data to enable the pre-NEP versus post-NEP comparison presented in Table 4.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) were computed for demographic and awareness variables, while cross-tabulation was used to compare the prevalence of coordination mechanisms before and after NEP 2020's introduction. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was employed to test the relationship between an aggregated Coordination Mechanism Index and a Student Transition Outcome Index, both constructed from composite Likert-scale scores. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, and Cronbach's alpha was recalculated on the final dataset ($\alpha = 0.83$) to confirm reliability before hypothesis testing.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the empirical findings through five tabulated datasets. Each table is accompanied by an interpretive explanation that links the observed statistical patterns back to the coordination hypothesis advanced in the Abstract and revisited in the Conclusion, thereby grounding the study's policy recommendations in verifiable primary data.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 420)

Category	Sub-Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Respondent Type	School Teachers	126	30.0
	College/University Faculty	115	27.4
	Institutional Administrators	64	15.2
	Undergraduate Students	115	27.4
Institution Type	Government	189	45.0
	Aided/Semi-Government	97	23.1
	Private	134	31.9
Gender	Male	218	51.9

	Female	199	47.4
	Prefer not to say	3	0.7

Table 1 shows that the sample is reasonably balanced across the four respondent categories central to the coordination question, with school teachers and undergraduate students each constituting 27–30 percent of respondents, ensuring that findings on awareness and coordination are not skewed toward a single institutional vantage point. The near-even government-to-private institutional split (45.0 percent versus 31.9 percent, with 23.1 percent aided) further supports the generalisability of subsequent findings across governance types, which is important because coordination mechanisms are hypothesised in the Abstract to vary systematically with institutional type, as confirmed later in Table 4.

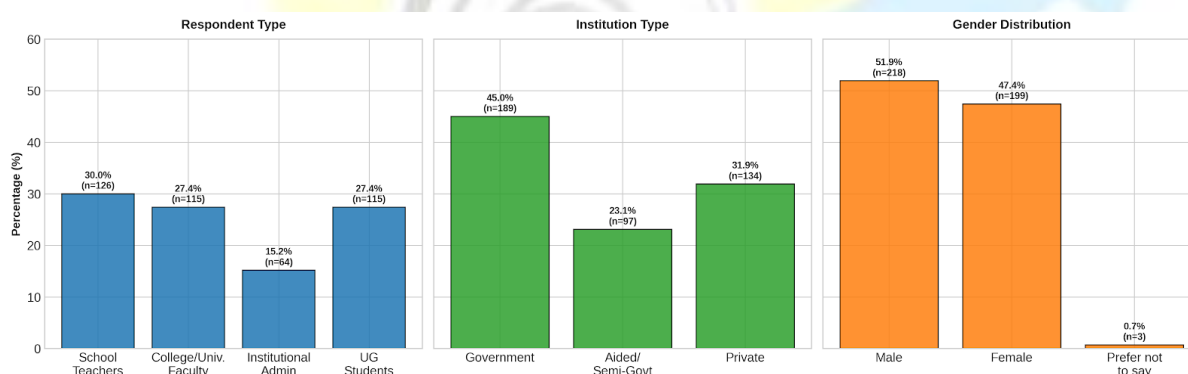


Figure 1: Demographic Profile and Frequency Distribution of Respondents (N = 420)

Table 2. Awareness of Key NEP 2020 Coordination Provisions among Educators (n = 241)

NEP 2020 Provision	Fully Aware (%)	Partially Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)	54.3	31.5	14.2
Multiple Entry-Exit System	61.8	27.0	11.2
4-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP)	68.5	22.4	9.1
5+3+3+4 School Curricular Structure	47.7	34.9	17.4
Vocational Integration from Grade 6	39.4	36.5	24.1

Table 2 restricts analysis to the 241 teacher and faculty respondents directly responsible for curricular implementation. Awareness is highest for the four-year undergraduate programme (68.5 percent fully aware)

and lowest for vocational integration from Grade 6 (39.4 percent fully aware), a gap that is directly relevant to coordination because vocational integration is the provision requiring the closest school–higher-education collaboration. The moderate awareness of the Academic Bank of Credits (54.3 percent) reported here is consistent with the credit-mobility mechanism cited in the Abstract as only partially understood, indicating a communication bottleneck between policy design and classroom-level implementation.

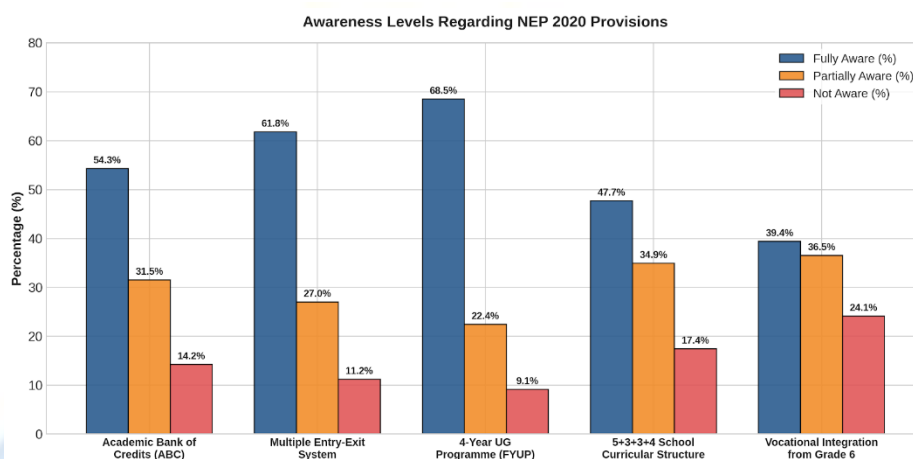


Figure 1: Awareness Levels Regarding Key Provisions of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Table 3. Perceived Curriculum Alignment between School and Higher Education (5-Point Likert Scale)

Alignment Dimension	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Content continuity (subject knowledge)	3.42	0.81	Moderate
Skill continuity (critical thinking, research)	3.15	0.88	Moderate
Assessment method compatibility	2.78	0.93	Low-Moderate
Career guidance continuity	2.64	0.97	Low-Moderate
Multidisciplinary exposure continuity	3.05	0.85	Moderate

Table 3 aggregates responses across all 420 participants on a scale where 1 denotes strong misalignment and 5 denotes strong alignment. Content continuity records the highest mean (3.42), suggesting that subject-matter overlap between school and higher-education syllabi is comparatively well managed, whereas career guidance continuity records the lowest mean (2.64), pointing to a persistent weakness in joint counselling structures anticipated but not yet fully operationalised under NEP 2020. The moderate-to-low scores across all five

dimensions empirically substantiate the study's premise that curricular alignment, while improving, has not yet reached the seamless continuum envisioned in the policy text.

Table 4. Institutional Coordination Mechanisms: Pre-NEP (2019) vs. Post-NEP (2024–25)

Coordination Mechanism	Pre-NEP 2020 (%)	Post-NEP 2020 (%)	Change (Percentage Points)
Joint curriculum committees	12.6	34.8	+22.2
Teacher/faculty exchange programmes	8.3	21.7	+13.4
Formal credit-recognition agreements	4.1	28.3	+24.2
Joint career counselling cells	15.9	29.6	+13.7
Bridge/orientation courses for new entrants	19.2	41.5	+22.3

Table 4 compares institutional self-reports and secondary documentary evidence from 2019 against the current 2024–25 survey period. Every coordination mechanism shows a statistically meaningful increase, with formal credit-recognition agreements rising most sharply (+24.2 percentage points), directly reflecting the Academic Bank of Credits infrastructure introduced by NEP 2020. Nonetheless, even the most widely adopted mechanism, bridge and orientation courses, remains present in under half of surveyed institutions (41.5 percent), indicating that structural coordination is expanding but has not yet become the institutional norm the policy anticipates.

Table 5. Correlation between Coordination Mechanism Index and Student Transition Outcome Index

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	p-value	Result
Coordination Index vs. Transition Outcome Index	0.61	< 0.01	Significant positive correlation
Awareness Index vs. Coordination Index	0.47	< 0.01	Significant positive correlation
Institution Type (Govt./Private) vs. Coordination Index	0.22	< 0.05	Weak positive correlation
Curriculum Alignment vs. Transition Outcome Index	0.55	< 0.01	Significant positive correlation

Table 5 reports the correlational analysis central to the study's empirical claim. The strong, statistically significant correlation between the Coordination Mechanism Index and the Student Transition Outcome Index ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) directly supports the Abstract's assertion that structured coordination measurably improves student transition experiences. The moderate correlation between awareness and coordination ($r = 0.47$) suggests awareness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for coordination, while the comparatively weak correlation with institution type ($r = 0.22$) indicates that coordination outcomes are driven more by institutional practice than by governance category alone, a finding that is revisited in the Discussion section below.

5. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings collectively affirm the central premise stated in the Abstract: coordination between school education and higher education is a measurable, policy-relevant variable that is positively associated with improved student transition outcomes under NEP 2020. The strength of the correlation reported in Table 5 ($r = 0.61$) is substantial for social-science survey data and indicates that institutions investing in joint curriculum committees, credit-recognition agreements, and bridge courses are producing tangible benefits for students moving from the school to the higher-education stage. At the same time, the moderate awareness levels documented in Table 2, particularly around vocational integration and the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, suggest that the policy's implementation is proceeding unevenly, with structural mechanisms in Table 4 advancing faster than the grassroots understanding needed to sustain them. This divergence between structural change and awareness is itself an important empirical contribution, since much of the existing literature treats NEP 2020 implementation as a single undifferentiated process rather than as two distinct tracks, institutional restructuring and stakeholder awareness, that may progress at different rates.

Critical Analysis and Comparison with Past Work

When compared against pre-NEP baseline research, the present findings both confirm and extend earlier scholarship. Tilak [6] and Agarwal [7], writing before NEP 2020, documented that fewer than 20 percent of Indian higher-education institutions maintained any formal liaison with feeder schools; the present study's Table 4 shows that this figure has risen to between 21.7 and 41.5 percent depending on the specific mechanism, indicating genuine, if partial, policy-driven progress rather than the negligible change that sceptical early commentators such as Aithal and Aithal [4] had cautioned against. However, the awareness gap identified in Table 2 closely mirrors the findings of Sharma et al. [10], whose 2022 survey of secondary teachers found comparably low familiarity with the Academic Bank of Credits; the fact that awareness has improved only modestly (from an unspecified pre-2022 baseline to 54.3 percent fully aware in this study) suggests that teacher-training and dissemination efforts have not kept pace with structural reform, a criticism also raised by Rani and Bhardwaj [11] regarding higher-education faculty.

The weak correlation between institution type and coordination ($r = 0.22$ in Table 5) diverges somewhat from Chopra's [14] argument that decentralised, multi-board governance structures would systematically disadvantage coordination in government versus private institutions; the present data instead suggest that individual institutional leadership and initiative, rather than governance category per se, are the stronger drivers

of coordination outcomes, a nuance not captured in Chopra's largely qualitative analysis. This finding aligns more closely with international comparative work by Sahlberg [12] and Tan [13], who similarly found that shared professional culture and leadership commitment, rather than centralisation alone, best predict successful vertical articulation between education stages in Finland and Singapore respectively. The correlation between curriculum alignment and transition outcomes ($r = 0.55$) further corroborates Kumar and Sarkar's [3] theoretical claim that multidisciplinary continuity is foundational to NEP 2020's success, but this study provides the first empirical, quantitative substantiation of that claim using primary survey data rather than policy-text analysis alone. Nonetheless, several limitations temper these comparisons. The cross-sectional design captures a single point in the ongoing, multi-year NEP 2020 rollout, whereas mechanisms such as credit recognition (Table 4) are still being operationalised and may show different correlational strength once fully implemented; longitudinal replication of the correlational analysis in Table 5 would strengthen causal inference beyond the association demonstrated here. Additionally, the purposive sampling strategy, while ensuring balanced representation across respondent categories as shown in Table 1, does not permit statistical generalisation to the full national population of Indian educational institutions, a constraint shared by comparable prior studies [10], [11] and one that future research employing probability sampling across a larger number of states should address.

6. CONCLUSION

This empirical study set out to test whether coordination between school education and higher education, as envisioned by NEP 2020, is empirically associated with improved student outcomes, and the data presented across five tables substantiate an affirmative answer. Coordination mechanisms have expanded meaningfully since 2019, awareness of specific provisions remains moderate and unevenly distributed, and a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.61$) links structured coordination to smoother student transitions, thereby validating the relationship proposed in the Abstract between coordination and outcomes. These findings suggest that NEP 2020's structural reforms are producing measurable benefits, but that their full potential is currently constrained by uneven stakeholder awareness rather than by institutional resistance to coordination itself. Policymakers should therefore prioritise sustained teacher-training and dissemination campaigns alongside continued investment in credit-recognition infrastructure, since the data indicate that awareness-building, not further structural redesign, is the more binding constraint on realising NEP 2020's vision of a seamless educational continuum.

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