



Implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in Assam

Abstract: India has implemented the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with the view of transforming its higher education system, aligning with the global standards and strengthening the nation's transition toward a knowledge-based economy. The policy aimed at revamping the system into a flexible, multidisciplinary, and research-oriented one with greater academic and institutional autonomy. A key reform of the system under the NEP 2020 is the introduction of the FYUGP across states. In Assam, it was introduced in the academic year 2023–24. It incorporates a flexible curriculum structure enriched with skill-based, value-added and inter-disciplinary courses, including provision for multiple entry and exit. Its Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) facilitates academic mobility and uninterrupted learning. Basing on secondary sources of information and applying qualitative technique, this paper attempts to investigate prospects of the programme and challenges of its implementation. We found that the FYUGP implementation in Assam faces significant structural and institutional challenges. Our study underscores inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, financial constraints, and governance inefficiencies as key hindrance of effective implementation of the programme. Furthermore, freezing of teacher recruitment, restrictions on appointment of contractual teachers in colleges of Assam, including partial as well as delays in reimbursement of student fees under government's schemes have aggravated the challenges. These challenges are more pronounced in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions with scarce institution for higher education. We argue that despite the potentiality of the FYUGP to reform higher education significantly, the programme would remain unsuccessful unless the critical infrastructural, financial and administrative gaps are addressed.

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1.Introduction

Development literature signifies that higher education plays a crucial role in societal development. It significantly contributes to the intellectual growth of individuals with advanced knowledge and skills, and prepares them for meaningful careers, valued civic and independent life. By enlightening them on various aspects of life, higher education makes people more capable of meaningful and constructive participation in social life (Das et al., 2023). Moreover, by supporting the creation of skilled human resources, fostering



innovation, and enhancing productivity, higher education contributes to long-term economic growth with sustainable livelihood (Yadab and Yadab, 2023). Quality higher education is, thus, crucial for national progress and human wellbeing.

In developing countries like India, higher education serves as a key driver of the transformation of nations towards knowledge-based economy. Studies highlight that universities or colleges play a multifaceted role in this regard by producing skilled workforce, advancing research, fostering critical thinking, and promoting civic engagement. These all are essential pillars of a knowledge economy (ibid). As India progresses towards becoming a knowledge society, a growing number of young people aspire to pursue higher education (Government of India, 2020). Indian universities or colleges are therefore urgently required to play a proactive role in meeting the requirements of a knowledge-based society with global standard and competitiveness.

However, studies on Indian higher education highlight many structural and institutional challenges. Researchers have pointed out that the system of Indian higher education remains highly fragmented and regulated by multiple bodies having no well connections to institutions, adversely affecting its efficiency (Chattopadhyay, 2020; Venkateshwarlu, 2021). It is argued that the rigid and outdated curriculum of higher education limit development of cognitive skill and learning outcomes (Bhandarkar, 2025). Furthermore, the early specialization and strict disciplinary separations have been obstruction of interdisciplinary learning and innovation, suggesting narrow pathways for learners (Government of India, 2020 & Gaurav, 2026). Unequal access to higher education also remains as a serious issue of concern, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged and rural areas, where there has still been dearth of

institutions for higher education (Upadhyay, 2025). Governance structures with ineffective administration and bureaucratic inefficiencies also lead to an ineffective regulation and functioning of higher education (Priyanka, 2024). For example, the prevalence of large number of institutions or colleges affiliating to universities leads to low academic standard and reduced quality of education (Government of India, 2020). Such limited institutional and teacher autonomy coupled with insufficient research fundings have been shown as some of the principal causes for the slow progression in merit-based career and limited improvement in teachers' quality, which in turn affects desirable educational outcomes (Deb & Lal, 2026). Expansion of institutions for quality higher education with greater operational and administrative autonomy to the extend to accessible for all is imperative for sustaining long-term economic growth and enhancing global competitiveness in our country. Growing demand for higher education necessitates a modern and adaptive education system matching global standards and fulfilling the present requirements of nation. The NEP 2020 was implemented with the objective of providing quality higher education required in modern era.

2. Methodology

This study is based on secondary source of information and uses descriptive and analytical research method. Information is gathered consulting government reports, policy documents, and relevant literature. Gathered information is analysed in detailed to contextualise findings and provide a holistic evaluation of the prospects and challenges of the FYUGP implementation in Assam. We believe that our study acts as base for further empirical research on various aspects of the NEP.



Implementation of the FYUGP

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is implemented, after 34 years from the year of last revision of the NEP in 1986, with a view of comprehensive transformation of India's higher education system by emphasizing multidisciplinary learning, institutional autonomy, research development, and streamlined governance (Yenugu, 2022). The policy envisions restructuring institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, promoting flexible undergraduate education, and enhancing student experiences through curriculum and pedagogical reforms. Additionally, the NEP 2020 focuses on improving access, equity, and inclusion through digital education, scholarships, and support for disadvantaged groups.

3.Features of NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 recommends establishing a simplified, transparent, and efficient regulatory framework for higher education. It proposes the creation of a single regulatory body, excluding legal and medical education. Accordingly, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is proposed to be established as a single regulatory authority, uniting the present multiple regulatory authorities such as the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), and General Education Council (GEC). Furthermore, it proposes the creation of a National Research Foundation (NRF) to provide funds and support institutions in promoting research and innovation (Umachagi & Tejashwini, 2023).

The NEP 2020 emphasises transition of higher education toward multidisciplinary one. Universities or colleges are expected to evolve into large multidisciplinary institutions with a minimum of 3,000 enrolment in each by 2040 with expectation of significant progress by 2030 (Priyanka, 2024). These institutions may

specialize either in teaching or research, while maintaining a broad academic framework. Furthermore, colleges are given flexibility to either become autonomous institutions or remain as a constituent college of university. An autonomous college has independent authority to decide or design its curriculum and syllabus, determine evaluation method, and award degree to its graduates. Additionally, such institutions enjoy greater academic, administrative, and financial autonomy. However, a constituent college is required to follow the curriculum prescribed by university, while examinations, evaluation procedures, and the award of degree are conducted in accordance with the regulations framed by university. Besides expected increase in gross enrolment ratio in higher educational institutions due the structural reform, the NEP 2020 is expected to transform those into capable of producing employable skilled graduates required to meet the demand for labour evolving in contemporary labour market.

The NEP 2020 promotes a holistic approach to education, shifting from the traditional teacher-centric approach to student-centric one. The new approach allows students to choose subjects of their interest, irrespective of disciplines to encourage multidisciplinary learning. It also emphasises on skill development and research exposure of learners from the undergraduate level (Yenugu, 2022). Moreover, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) incorporated in the new policy provides students with freedom for multiple entry and exit, enabling them to complete degrees at their own pace. Additionally, it strengthens digital learning through the expansion of online platforms and the digitization of libraries (Narkhede, et al., 2025). Presence of counselling centres in HEIs is also pressed/emphasised by the policy to supporting mental well-being of learners.



4. Benefits of NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 is expected to significantly improve the quality and global competitiveness of India's education system. It aims to bridge existing gaps, promote innovation, and support the development of skilled human resources. Under this framework the institutions for higher education are granted with greater autonomy in student enrolment, teacher appointment, curriculum framing, and research and innovations. Additionally, the policy sets and targets to achieve goals aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also makes provisions for equal access to higher education for all sections of the society. It proposes the provisions for teacher training to enhance quality of teachers. The policy encourages research at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, supported by funding from the National Research Foundation. It also promotes online and distance learning, which is expected to improve access and increase GER. Finally, Indian institutions are now allowed to collaborate freely with foreign universities, enabling global exposure and academic exchange.

5. FYUGP in Assam

Like the other states, Assam introduced the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in the academic year 2023–24, emphasising both academic and administrative flexibility. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accredited colleges are encouraged to opt for autonomous degree colleges. As of now a total number of 24 colleges have already been converted to autonomous degree college in the state of Assam. All colleges in Assam are now required to offer four years courses to the students who are eligible and willing to pursue the fourth-year courses. The FYUGP in Assam incorporates a flexible curriculum structure enriched with skill-based, value-added and inter-disciplinary courses, and the provision

for multiple entry and exit. Ensuring academic flexibility, it allows students to choose major and minor subjects across streams, such as combining arts with commerce or science. Furthermore, skill enhancement, interdisciplinary and value-added courses are made compulsory components of the FYUGP.

The credits earned by the students from the courses are stored in Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) which can be transferred across institutions, enabling mobility and lifelong learning. Students having left their studies prior to completion of the courses can rejoin the same from where they left out with their preserved credits. However, such students have to complete the course within a maximum period of seven years from registration date. As per the norms, a student who exits after completing the first year (two semesters) is awarded an undergraduate certificate, while leaving after two years (four semesters) leads to a diploma. Students, those who complete three years courses with no backlog, are awarded graduate degree and they earn eligibility for admission into post graduate courses in universities. On the other end, students completing four-year programme with a minimum 75 percent marks or equivalent CGPA are awarded degree with honours or honours with research. Such students can join directly the research programme with one year PG course in universities. The FYUGP is, therefore, particularly beneficial for those aiming for research, or higher education. Furthermore, students completing a three-year degree need two years to finish a master's programme, whereas those completing the four-year honours or research degree require only one additional year, making the total duration of a master's degree course for five years in both pathways.



6. Challenges in implementation of the programme in Assam

In Assam, it has been four years since the implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) in colleges or universities. Under this framework, the colleges are required to introduce the fourth-year courses from this current academic year. This would lead to addition of another students' batch to existing ones, resulting in a significant increase in student enrolment across colleges. This increase in student enrolment necessitates adequate infrastructural support, including the provision of adequate classrooms, well-equipped and standardised laboratories for science students, and libraries stocked with adequate course-related books. Most importantly, qualified teachers are required to be appointed to deal with additional workloads arise due to implementation of the fourth-year course. Without these essential supports, the successful execution of the programme remains a challenge.

It is worth mentioning here that the teacher appointment in provincialised colleges of Assam has remained frozen for the past several years, resulting in an acute shortage of teachers and resultant adverse effect on the effective curriculum delivery. Colleges have been compelled to be dependent on contractual or visiting faculty, leading to substantial financial burdens due to honorarium payments to them. Moreover, a recent restriction on the engagement of contractual teachers in provincialised colleges vide letter eCF No. 778434/2026/3 dated 17th March 2026, notified by the Assam's Higher Education Department has intensified the crisis. It also needs to mention here that a large number of students from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households enrolled in colleges under the government's free-ship scheme. It is alleged on several occasions that the Government of Assam does not reimburse their admission fees in a timely

manner, and the partial amount due is being paid in many cases. This also leads to critical concern relating to the financial sustainability of colleges. The introduction of fourth-year courses with no corresponding infrastructural expansion and improvement of faculty strength has further exacerbated this problem. Addressing such gaps in infrastructure, faculty recruitment, and financial support is, therefore, imperative for successful implementation of the FYUGP and subsequent achievement of the NEP's broader objective.

7. Conclusion

The NEP 2020 represents a transformative vision for Indian higher education. It aims to create a dynamic and globally competitive higher education system through multidisciplinary approach and by promoting research excellence and integrating technology in teaching-learning process. Its institutional restructures into Research-Intensive, Teaching-Intensive, and Autonomous Degree-Granting Colleges reflects a strategic effort to achieve the goal of the new policy. While the policy offers significant opportunities for educational advancement, its success depends on effective implementation, adequate funding, and continuous stakeholder engagement. If implemented successfully, the NEP 2020 has the potential to reshape India's higher education landscape and contribute significantly to national development, innovation, and social progress.

However, the realization of these noble goals is dependent on effective execution of the programme at the institutional level. Evidence from recent studies exhibits challenges being faced by institutions in implementation of the programme, such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified faculty, financial constraints, and governance inefficiencies, hindering the successful execution of the reforms. In the context of Assam, the FYUGP introduction with no corresponding improvements in physical and academic



resources risks compromising the quality and inclusiveness of higher education. Several issues like delayed financial reimbursements, freezing on faculty appointment, and increased dependence on contractual staff further intensify institutional vulnerabilities. Addressing these gaps is essential not only for ensuring equitable access and quality education but also for achieving the broader national goal of building a competitive, knowledge-driven society. A coordinated effort between government, institutions, and stakeholders is thus imperative to translate the vision of NEP 2020 into tangible outcomes.

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