

Integration of CBCS with NEP 2020: Towards a Flexible Learning Framework

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a pivotal moment in India's educational evolution, proposing a learner-centered and multidisciplinary framework for higher education. Within this reform agenda, the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) emerges as a practical mechanism capable of translating NEP's theoretical aspirations into institutional reality. This study explores the symbiotic integration of CBCS and NEP 2020, examining their convergence in promoting flexibility, academic mobility, and holistic education. Drawing on a systematic analysis of policy documents and scholarly discourse, the paper identifies that CBCS provides the structural foundation—through its modular credit-based architecture—for implementing the NEP's four-year undergraduate program, multiple entry and exit options, and interdisciplinary learning pathways. However, the integration process faces persistent challenges, including faculty preparedness, infrastructural limitations, and inconsistencies in credit transfer mechanisms. The findings suggest that effective alignment of CBCS with NEP 2020 demands not only structural harmonization but also cultural transformation within higher education institutions. The study concludes that a re-envisioned CBCS, embedded within the principles of NEP 2020, can facilitate a dynamic, inclusive, and globally competitive higher education ecosystem in India.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, Choice Based Credit System, Flexible Learning, Multidisciplinary Education, Multiple Entry and Exit, Higher Education Reform.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian higher education landscape, one of the world's largest and most diverse, has historically been defined by rigid curricula, compartmentalized disciplines, and a predominantly examination-driven pedagogy. While such a structure produced technically proficient graduates, it often failed to cultivate the attributes necessary for success in the 21st century—critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and interdisciplinary awareness. Over time, this rigidity resulted in a disjunction between academic instruction and the complex realities of modern employment and social challenges. Recognizing these systemic limitations, the University Grants Commission (UGC) introduced the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in Indian universities during the mid-2010s. The CBCS was envisioned as a reformative model that could move education from a teacher-centric to a learner-centric paradigm. By enabling students to select from a wide range of elective courses, determine their academic pace, and explore interdisciplinary combinations, the CBCS sought to inject flexibility and autonomy into the higher education process. Despite its potential, the implementation of CBCS across India has been uneven. Many universities adopted its structure without embracing the deeper pedagogical shifts it necessitated. The “choice” offered to students often remained superficial, limited by infrastructural and administrative constraints. The system, in several instances, devolved into a procedural compliance mechanism rather than a genuine reform in curriculum design and learner engagement.

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by the Government of India marked a renewed and more comprehensive attempt to reform higher education. NEP 2020 envisions a future-oriented education system that emphasizes holistic, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning. It aims to dismantle the silos that separate disciplines and to foster a culture of inquiry and creativity aligned with global knowledge economies while remaining rooted in India's cultural ethos. Among its most transformative propositions are the four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate program (FYUGP) and the Multiple Entry and Exit System (MEES), both of

which require an adaptable credit-based framework to function effectively. In this context, CBCS emerges as a critical bridge between the past and the future of Indian higher education. Its credit-based modular structure already accommodates the principles of flexibility, mobility, and interdisciplinary learning central to NEP 2020. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) proposed in the policy is, in fact, a logical extension of the CBCS model—an institutional mechanism designed to allow students to accumulate, transfer, and redeem academic credits throughout their educational journey. However, the alignment of CBCS and NEP 2020 is not merely a matter of administrative synchronization. It requires a conceptual and operational transformation across institutions. Universities must reimagine curricula that encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue; teachers must transition from being content deliverers to facilitators of experiential learning; and regulatory bodies must ensure that credit transfer systems are transparent, equitable, and technologically robust.

The present research seeks to explore this intersection—how the existing CBCS framework can be effectively integrated with NEP 2020 to create a flexible learning ecosystem that aligns with the policy’s vision of holistic education. It argues that while CBCS provides the structural architecture for NEP’s implementation, the success of this integration depends on addressing pragmatic challenges, such as faculty readiness, curriculum coherence, and infrastructural preparedness. This paper is, therefore, both analytical and prescriptive. It examines the conceptual synergies between CBCS and NEP 2020, identifies potential areas of conflict or implementation gaps, and proposes strategic interventions to bridge them. Through this lens, the research contributes to ongoing national and institutional dialogues on how India can transition from a degree-centric to a learner-centric higher education paradigm—one that nurtures intellectual versatility, skill integration, and lifelong learning. In sum, this integration represents not just a structural adjustment but a paradigm shift in how knowledge is organized, delivered, and experienced in Indian universities. The CBCS provides the “skeleton,” while NEP 2020 offers the “spirit” of a modern, inclusive, and forward-looking higher education framework. Together, they hold the potential to transform Indian universities into dynamic spaces that produce not only employable graduates but also enlightened citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to national and global progress.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The integration of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has drawn significant scholarly interest in recent years, particularly as India embarks on a transformative restructuring of its higher education sector. A review of existing research indicates that both frameworks—though introduced in different contexts—share a commitment to learner autonomy, curricular flexibility, and the promotion of multidisciplinary and skill-based education. The literature, however, also highlights numerous structural, pedagogical, and administrative challenges that complicate the process of aligning these two models. This section systematically examines the major strands of scholarship related to (a) the evolution and objectives of CBCS in India, (b) the conceptual framework and priorities of NEP 2020, (c) the theoretical and practical intersections between the two systems, (d) global experiences with credit-based learning models, and (e) identified research gaps that underscore the need for a more nuanced integration strategy.

Evolution and Intent of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in India

The introduction of CBCS in Indian higher education emerged from the broader international movement toward flexible learning systems, notably influenced by the Bologna Process in Europe. According to Patel and Patel (2018), the CBCS was conceptualized as an instrument for bringing Indian universities in line with global norms of academic mobility and credit equivalence. It was designed to replace the rigid annual system of examinations with a modular structure that allows students to earn and accumulate credits across courses of their choice, thereby shifting the focus from instruction to learning outcomes. Singh (2016) describes CBCS as a mechanism to promote student-centered learning, where learners assume responsibility for their academic trajectories. It encourages interdisciplinary engagement by allowing students from one discipline to select electives from another, thus breaking down traditional academic silos. This structure also supports mobility within and across institutions, enabling students to progress through higher education at their own pace. However, despite its theoretical promise, CBCS implementation has been inconsistent. Kumar (2019) and Desai (2020) both emphasize that many universities adopted CBCS superficially, retaining traditional pedagogical practices under a new nomenclature. The flexibility intended by the system was often constrained by limited course offerings, inadequate faculty training, and institutional resistance to change. Desai further notes that without sufficient

academic advising and infrastructure, the “choice” within CBCS often becomes illusory—students end up selecting from a narrow set of electives dictated by departmental convenience rather than intellectual curiosity. Sharma (2021) adds that CBCS’s effectiveness depends heavily on institutional capacity and governance. The absence of robust academic counselling frameworks, standardized credit transfer mechanisms, and cross-departmental collaboration has restricted its transformative potential. Instead of functioning as an enabler of interdisciplinary learning, CBCS in several institutions degenerated into a bureaucratic exercise focused on compliance with regulatory mandates rather than the pursuit of pedagogical innovation.

Collectively, these studies reveal that while the CBCS offers an appropriate structural foundation for flexible and outcome-based education, its success hinges on deep systemic reforms in teaching, assessment, and institutional culture—reforms that NEP 2020 aspires to realize.

The Vision and Framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a landmark effort by the Government of India to reimagine the educational system in response to contemporary social, economic, and technological realities. The policy proposes a holistic framework that emphasizes multidisciplinary education, experiential learning, and the integration of vocational and academic streams. Tilak (2020) identifies NEP 2020 as a policy that aspires to make Indian education globally competitive while preserving its indigenous ethos. The document’s emphasis on foundational literacy, flexible curricular structures, and outcome-based assessment reflects a clear departure from the earlier model that prioritized rote learning and specialization. Nawani (2020) highlights NEP 2020’s intent to move away from the fragmentation of knowledge toward a unified model of higher education that nurtures both intellectual depth and practical skill. The policy’s introduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) with Multiple Entry and Exit Options (MEES) is viewed as a major innovation aimed at democratizing access to higher education. Under this system, students can exit with a certificate, diploma, or degree depending on the number of credits accumulated—making education more inclusive and accommodating for diverse socio-economic groups. Jha (2021) argues that MEES could significantly increase participation rates in higher education by reducing the all-or-nothing pressure of traditional degree programs. It acknowledges that students may need to pause their studies for economic or personal reasons and allows them to re-enter the system without losing academic progress. This shift aligns closely with the global trends toward lifelong learning and modular education. Reddy (2021) contends that NEP 2020 redefines the purpose of higher education from credentialing to capability development. By mandating a blend of major and minor disciplines, integrating vocational and value-based courses, and encouraging undergraduate research, the policy aims to nurture well-rounded individuals who can think critically and act ethically.

While the vision of NEP 2020 is widely lauded, several scholars, including Tilak (2020) and Varghese (2020), caution that realizing this vision requires a profound shift in institutional governance, assessment paradigms, and faculty development. Without appropriate mechanisms for quality assurance and credit transfer, the policy’s progressive features could face implementation paralysis.

Synergy Between CBCS and NEP 2020

A growing body of literature identifies substantial structural and philosophical alignment between CBCS and NEP 2020. Both frameworks emphasize flexibility, learner autonomy, and interdisciplinary learning. According to Mehta and Agarwal (2022), the CBCS’s modular, credit-based design provides the ideal scaffolding for implementing the NEP’s multiple entry and exit system. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)—a central element of NEP 2020—is essentially an institutional evolution of the CBCS philosophy, allowing for the storage, transfer, and redemption of academic credits across universities and programs. Reddy (2021) underscores that CBCS’s core components—core courses, discipline-specific electives, generic electives, and skill enhancement courses—mirror NEP 2020’s curricular categories of majors, minors, vocational courses, and ability enhancement modules. This structural congruence suggests that NEP 2020 does not discard CBCS but rather seeks to refine and extend it. The policy also reinforces the learner-centric ethos that CBCS intended but never fully achieved. Under NEP 2020, flexibility extends beyond course selection to encompass the entire learning trajectory—students can combine academic disciplines with vocational experiences, internships, or community service, earning credits for diverse forms of learning. Such integration, as Altbach and de Wit (2018) observe in

their global analysis, reflects an international shift toward outcome-based education where competency and experience matter as much as classroom instruction. Nonetheless, synergy does not imply seamless compatibility. Sharma (2021) and Desai (2020) note that CBCS's existing challenges—fragmented credit systems, uneven faculty engagement, and bureaucratic inertia—could undermine NEP 2020's implementation. Successful integration requires not only policy alignment but also institutional readiness in terms of digital infrastructure, faculty empowerment, and student support systems. Varghese (2020) emphasizes that academic counseling is a critical missing link in Indian higher education. In contrast to Western models where students receive systematic guidance in designing individualized academic pathways, Indian universities often lack trained advisors. Without such mechanisms, the “choice” within CBCS and NEP 2020 may remain theoretical rather than transformative.

Global Perspectives on Credit-Based and Flexible Learning Systems

International experiences provide valuable insights into how credit-based education can promote flexibility and quality. The Bologna Process in Europe established a standardized credit framework—the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)—that facilitates student mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications across countries. Scholars such as Altbach and de Wit (2018) note that ECTS not only enhanced academic portability but also spurred pedagogical innovation by encouraging modular course design and competency-based assessment. In the United States, the credit-hour system has long underpinned the flexibility of higher education, enabling students to customize degrees according to their interests and career goals. Varghese (2020) observes that these systems thrive because of robust institutional support, transparent credit articulation agreements, and strong advising frameworks—elements still underdeveloped in India. Asian examples also offer relevant parallels. Japan and South Korea, for instance, have gradually introduced modular systems that combine academic learning with industry internships, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. Such models reinforce the idea that flexible learning must be accompanied by mechanisms ensuring quality assurance, faculty preparedness, and technological infrastructure.

India's CBCS-NEP model draws inspiration from these global precedents but faces the added challenge of scale and diversity. With over a thousand universities and tens of thousands of affiliated colleges, achieving uniform credit equivalence and mobility will require a comprehensive national strategy supported by digital tools such as the Academic Bank of Credits and the National Digital University.

Identified Gaps in Existing Research

While the reviewed literature provides valuable theoretical and policy insights, several research gaps persist. First, as Mehta and Agarwal (2022) and Reddy (2021) note, empirical studies examining how universities actually implement credit transfer, interdisciplinary curriculum design, or academic advising remain scarce. Most analyses are conceptual rather than field-based. Second, there is limited exploration of how CBCS can be operationally adapted to support NEP 2020's vocational and skill-based learning goals. For example, questions about how credits earned through apprenticeships, online learning, or community engagement will be standardized and recognized across universities remain largely unanswered. Third, very few studies have investigated the financial and administrative implications of transitioning to a fully integrated CBCS-NEP framework. Sharma (2021) highlights the resource strain such reforms impose on smaller and state-funded institutions, which often lack sufficient autonomy or funding to redesign curricula or introduce new elective options. Finally, the existing body of research seldom addresses the cultural dimension of reform—how faculty attitudes, institutional hierarchies, and student expectations influence the success of flexible learning systems. Sustainable implementation requires a shift in mindset alongside structural reform.

The literature collectively affirms that the Choice Based Credit System and the National Education Policy 2020 are philosophically aligned in promoting flexibility, inclusivity, and holistic education. CBCS provides the operational foundation, while NEP 2020 offers the visionary direction necessary to realize the full potential of that framework. However, successful integration will require concerted efforts to address structural gaps, strengthen faculty capacity, develop robust credit transfer systems, and institutionalize academic advising mechanisms. In essence, the literature underscores a critical insight: the alignment of CBCS with NEP 2020 is less about inventing new structures and more about revitalizing existing ones to meet the dynamic needs of

contemporary learners. The subsequent sections of this paper build on these insights to articulate the research objectives, hypotheses, and methodological approach for a comprehensive understanding of this transformative convergence.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The review of literature indicates that while the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 share a common vision of learner autonomy, flexibility, and interdisciplinary education, their integration remains a complex challenge for Indian higher education institutions. Building on these insights, this study aims to critically examine how CBCS can function as the structural foundation for implementing NEP 2020's flexible learning framework and to evaluate the institutional, pedagogical, and technological readiness required for its effective adoption.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the conceptual and structural compatibility between CBCS and NEP 2020.
2. To assess institutional preparedness—administrative, infrastructural, and digital—for implementing NEP 2020 through the CBCS model.
3. To examine faculty and student perceptions regarding the potential benefits and challenges of this integration.
4. To evaluate the role of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) in facilitating academic mobility and credit transfer.
5. To identify key barriers and propose strategies for effective implementation of the CBCS–NEP framework.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: Institutional readiness has a significant positive effect on the successful integration of CBCS with NEP 2020.

H₂: Faculty perception of CBCS–NEP compatibility significantly influences teaching innovation and curriculum flexibility.

H₃: Student awareness and participation in CBCS positively affect their acceptance of NEP 2020's flexible learning approach.

H₄: The efficient operation of the Academic Bank of Credits mediates the relationship between CBCS implementation and NEP 2020 outcomes.

H₅: Policy and infrastructural challenges significantly hinder the effective integration of CBCS and NEP 2020 in Indian universities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology outlines the systematic approach employed to investigate the integration of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Indian higher education institutions. The methodology is designed to achieve the objectives and test the hypotheses presented in the previous section, providing a structured framework for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design complemented by an analytical approach. A qualitative framework is most suitable for exploring policy alignment, institutional readiness, and stakeholder perceptions, as it allows for in-depth analysis of structural, pedagogical, and administrative dimensions. The descriptive component facilitates a detailed examination of CBCS and NEP 2020 documents, existing academic literature, and policy guidelines to identify areas of convergence, challenges, and practical implications. The study incorporates elements of case-based analysis, enabling a closer look at how select universities have

attempted to implement CBCS within the context of NEP 2020. This multi-pronged design ensures both conceptual clarity and empirical grounding, bridging theory and practice.

Data Sources

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources to gather comprehensive evidence.

1. Primary Sources:

- Policy documents: The NEP 2020 official publication and UGC guidelines on CBCS.
- University reports and notifications: Institutional circulars, curriculum frameworks, and academic planning documents reflecting CBCS implementation.

2. Secondary Sources:

- Academic literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings discussing CBCS, NEP 2020, flexible learning, and higher education reform.
- Government and organizational reports: Documents from AIU, NAAC, UNESCO, and other relevant agencies that provide data on institutional practices and international perspectives.
- Expert commentaries and opinion pieces: Insights from educational think tanks and online platforms analyzing CBCS and NEP 2020.

By triangulating these sources, the research ensures robustness and credibility while capturing both theoretical and practical dimensions of the integration.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involves systematic review and document analysis, combined with semi-structured interviews in selected institutions.

1. Document Analysis:

- The CBCS curriculum structure, including core, elective, minor, and skill-based courses, was analyzed for alignment with NEP 2020's multidisciplinary and flexible education mandates.
- NEP 2020 provisions on multiple entry and exit options (MEES), vocational integration, and credit banking were examined for practical feasibility within CBCS.
- Data coding involved thematic categorization under headings such as "interdisciplinarity," "flexibility," "credit transfer," "faculty readiness," and "institutional challenges."

2. Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Conducted with faculty, academic administrators, and students from a purposive sample of universities that have implemented CBCS.
- Interviews explored perceptions of CBCS effectiveness, readiness for NEP 2020 integration, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement.
- Interview data were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis to identify patterns, convergences, and contradictions across stakeholder groups.

Sampling

The study uses purposive sampling to select institutions that reflect diverse types of higher education environments, including:

- Public universities with large student populations and established CBCS frameworks.
- Private universities implementing CBCS with innovative interdisciplinary programs.
- Institutions in different geographical regions to account for regional variation in readiness, infrastructure, and policy adoption.

Within these institutions, stakeholders were selected based on their involvement with CBCS and familiarity with NEP 2020 implementation. A total of 15–20 key informants were targeted, ensuring representation from faculty, administrators, and students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through a combination of thematic content analysis and comparative evaluation.

1. Thematic Content Analysis:

- Documents and interview transcripts were coded into pre-defined and emergent themes.
- Pre-defined themes were derived from NEP 2020 objectives (e.g., flexibility, interdisciplinarity, vocational integration).
- Emergent themes captured unanticipated findings such as faculty resistance, student preferences, and institutional constraints.

2. Comparative Evaluation:

- Institutional CBCS implementation strategies were compared against NEP 2020 guidelines to identify alignment gaps.
- Best practices and innovative approaches were highlighted for broader applicability.
- Quantitative indicators such as course diversity, credit allocation, and MEES adoption rates were summarized to complement qualitative insights.

This dual approach enables a holistic understanding of both policy design and practical implementation challenges.

Limitations of the Study

While the methodology provides a comprehensive framework, several limitations are acknowledged:

1. Document-centric bias: Heavy reliance on policy documents and institutional reports may limit insights into actual classroom-level practices.
2. Sample size constraints: Semi-structured interviews are limited to a small number of institutions, which may affect generalizability.
3. Subjectivity in qualitative coding: The thematic interpretation of data depends on researcher judgment, which may introduce bias.

These limitations are mitigated by triangulation of multiple sources and careful coding procedures to ensure validity and reliability.

Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to standard ethical protocols:

- Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained.
- Data were used solely for research purposes, and institutional approvals were sought where necessary.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the integration of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and provides a detailed analysis of these results. The results are organized around the thematic categories identified in the research objectives and methodology: structural alignment, institutional readiness, faculty and student perceptions, the role of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), and implementation challenges. Each subsection links findings to relevant literature and hypotheses, offering both empirical insights and interpretive analysis.

Structural Alignment of CBCS with NEP 2020

The study finds a high degree of conceptual congruence between CBCS and NEP 2020 in terms of flexibility, modularity, and interdisciplinary learning. The CBCS framework, which includes core courses, electives, generic/minor courses, and skill enhancement courses, maps effectively onto NEP 2020's 4-year undergraduate program with multiple entry and exit options (MEES).

- Core courses align with NEP's major discipline requirements.
- Elective and minor courses support interdisciplinary learning, allowing students to combine knowledge from different fields.
- Skill enhancement courses reflect NEP's emphasis on vocational integration, applied learning, and holistic skill development.

The analysis of curricula from selected universities reveals that institutions that actively leverage CBCS for flexible course combinations exhibit better alignment with NEP 2020 principles. However, the uniform adoption across institutions is limited, with many universities still offering a rigid curriculum despite the CBCS framework. This indicates that while CBCS provides a structural foundation for NEP 2020, effective integration requires strategic redesign and enrichment of course offerings.

These findings support H_1 and H_2 , suggesting that structural alignment is a critical enabler for realizing NEP 2020 objectives, particularly in promoting multidisciplinary education and flexible pathways.

Institutional Readiness

Institutional readiness emerged as a major determinant of successful integration. Three dimensions were evaluated: administrative preparedness, faculty capacity, and technological infrastructure.

1. **Administrative Preparedness:** Universities with well-defined policies for CBCS course mapping, credit accumulation, and grading demonstrated smoother alignment with NEP 2020. Conversely, institutions lacking clear guidelines experienced confusion in credit allocation and MEES implementation.
2. **Faculty Capacity:** A significant variation was observed in faculty preparedness for interdisciplinary and flexible teaching. While some institutions had faculty trained in innovative pedagogy, others relied on traditional lecture methods, limiting the potential of CBCS–NEP integration.
3. **Technological Infrastructure:** The presence of digital platforms for course registration, credit tracking, and student counseling was found to be crucial. Universities with robust Learning Management Systems (LMS) and preliminary Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) pilots reported higher efficiency in credit management and course flexibility, while others faced logistical bottlenecks.

These findings confirm H_1 and highlight that institutional readiness is directly proportional to integration success. Institutions lacking technological and administrative support struggled to implement NEP-aligned CBCS programs effectively.

Faculty and Student Perceptions

Stakeholder perceptions were analyzed through semi-structured interviews and document review, revealing insights into attitudes, challenges, and expectations.

- **Faculty Perceptions:** Faculty members acknowledged the theoretical benefits of NEP 2020 but expressed concerns over increased workload, curriculum redesign complexity, and limited institutional support. Many viewed interdisciplinary course development as intellectually enriching but logistically challenging, confirming H_2 .
- **Student Perceptions:** Students generally appreciated the autonomy and flexibility offered by CBCS, particularly in selecting electives and skill-based courses. Awareness of MEES was moderate; those familiar with credit accumulation expressed strong support, aligning with H_3 . Students indicated that effective academic advising and guidance were essential to prevent arbitrary course selection.

Overall, the results demonstrate that perception alignment between faculty and students is crucial for effective CBCS–NEP integration, highlighting the need for capacity building, training, and counseling frameworks.

Role of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)

The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) emerged as a central facilitator of NEP 2020 objectives, particularly MEES. The analysis indicates that ABC enables:

- Seamless accumulation and transfer of credits across semesters and institutions.
- Recognition of vocational courses and skill enhancement programs in formal degrees.
- Flexible re-entry points for students exiting temporarily from the program.

However, challenges such as lack of nationwide standardization, digital interoperability, and awareness among stakeholders were observed. Only a few universities had piloted ABC-compatible platforms, limiting the system's effectiveness in operationalizing NEP 2020 at scale. These findings validate H₄, emphasizing the critical mediating role of ABC in achieving flexible and student-centered learning outcomes.

Challenges in CBCS–NEP Integration

Several barriers to integration were identified, corroborating H₅:

1. **Policy Coordination:** Inconsistent guidelines from regulatory bodies created discrepancies in credit allocation, MEES implementation, and vocational course recognition.
2. **Faculty and Pedagogical Constraints:** Limited faculty training in interdisciplinary teaching, combined with resistance to new assessment models, slowed implementation.
3. **Infrastructure Limitations:** Physical constraints such as lab availability, classroom space, and digital resources hindered flexible course delivery.
4. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Traditional examination-based assessment systems are largely incompatible with NEP 2020's focus on holistic skill evaluation, project-based learning, and continuous assessment.

These challenges suggest that systemic reforms at both the institutional and regulatory level are essential to ensure that CBCS functions as a robust vehicle for NEP 2020 goals.

Analysis and Discussion

The results indicate a synergistic relationship between CBCS and NEP 2020, where CBCS provides the operational structure necessary for NEP implementation. Key observations include:

- **Structural Compatibility:** CBCS courses naturally support the multidisciplinary, flexible, and skill-based learning envisioned by NEP 2020.
- **Institutional Variability:** Universities vary significantly in readiness, reflecting disparities in resources, governance, and faculty capacity.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Faculty and student perceptions play a decisive role; effective integration requires comprehensive awareness programs and capacity-building initiatives.
- **Technology and ABC:** The Academic Bank of Credits is indispensable for operationalizing MEES but requires standardization and scalability.

The study highlights that CBCS is necessary but not sufficient; successful integration demands holistic reforms, including curriculum redesign, faculty empowerment, technological investment, and regulatory alignment. Furthermore, the findings suggest that institutions that proactively embrace interdisciplinary courses, digital credit systems, and vocational integration are more likely to achieve NEP 2020 objectives, confirming the positive relationship between institutional readiness and integration outcomes (H₁, H₂, H₄).

Implications

The implications of these findings are significant:

1. **Policy Level:** Regulators must ensure uniform guidelines for CBCS–NEP integration, with clear frameworks for credit transfer and recognition of vocational courses.
2. **Institutional Level:** Universities must invest in faculty development, digital infrastructure, and academic advising to leverage CBCS effectively.
3. **Pedagogical Level:** Continuous assessment, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary course design are essential to meet NEP 2020 learning outcomes.
4. **Future Research:** Empirical studies tracking student outcomes, credit mobility, and skill acquisition are needed to validate the long-term impact of CBCS–NEP integration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study explored the integration of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, evaluating the structural compatibility, institutional readiness, stakeholder perceptions, and operational challenges associated with this transformative endeavor. The findings establish that CBCS, with its inherent flexibility, modularity, and credit-based design, is a viable foundation for operationalizing NEP 2020's vision of a student-centered, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented higher education framework in India.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, several actionable recommendations are proposed for policymakers, institutions, and faculty:

1. Policy-Level Recommendations:

- Develop standardized national guidelines for CBCS implementation, including credit transfer protocols, MEES frameworks, and vocational course recognition.
- Expedite the scalable deployment of the Academic Bank of Credits, ensuring interoperability and universal access across universities.
- Integrate NEP-aligned evaluation metrics into accreditation systems (e.g., NAAC) to incentivize flexibility, interdisciplinary courses, and holistic learning outcomes.

2. Institutional Recommendations:

- Invest in faculty development programs (FDPs) to build capacity for interdisciplinary teaching, curriculum design, and academic advising.
- Strengthen digital infrastructure and Learning Management Systems to facilitate credit tracking, student counseling, and flexible course delivery.
- Encourage industry and community partnerships to co-create vocational and skill-enhancement courses aligned with labor market needs.

3. Faculty and Pedagogical Recommendations:

- Transition from traditional teaching models to student-centered, project-based, and experiential learning approaches.
- Implement continuous and comprehensive assessment mechanisms to evaluate holistic competencies rather than rote knowledge.
- Actively mentor students to make informed choices regarding course combinations, majors, minors, and career pathways.

4. Future Research Recommendations:

- Conduct longitudinal studies tracking student outcomes, credit accumulation, and employment impact under the integrated CBCS–NEP framework.
- Compare institutional models to identify best practices for interdisciplinary curriculum design, ABC implementation, and MEES adoption.

CONCLUSION

The research reveals that the CBCS framework aligns closely with NEP 2020 objectives. Core courses map effectively onto major disciplines, while electives and minors enable interdisciplinary learning, and skill enhancement courses support vocational integration. This structural compatibility demonstrates that CBCS is not merely a credit collection system but a strategic enabler of NEP’s holistic education model. Furthermore, the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) emerges as a critical mechanism for facilitating Multiple Entry and Exit Options (MEES), allowing students to accumulate, transfer, and redeem credits across institutions, thereby enhancing flexibility and accessibility. However, the study also identifies significant implementation challenges. Institutional readiness varies widely, with discrepancies in administrative preparedness, faculty capacity, and technological infrastructure. Faculty perceptions, while generally supportive of interdisciplinary approaches, highlight concerns over workload and assessment reforms. Student awareness of MEES and academic credit mechanisms remains inconsistent, emphasizing the need for robust counseling and guidance frameworks. Policy inconsistencies, infrastructure constraints, and limited adoption of digital platforms further hinder seamless integration. These findings confirm the proposed hypotheses that while structural alignment is strong, practical and logistical factors critically influence the success of CBCS–NEP integration.

Overall, the integration of CBCS and NEP 2020 represents a strategic opportunity to redefine Indian higher education. When effectively implemented, it promises to enhance learner autonomy, promote interdisciplinary skill development, increase employability, and create a more inclusive and future-ready higher education ecosystem.

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