The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 14, Issue 2, April- June, 2026
DIP: 18.01.097.20261402, DOI: 10.25215/1402.097
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Youth Perspectives and Expectations from NEP 2020 in Indian Higher Education

Rashmi Singh[1]*, Eva Seth[2]

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Indian higher education, amplifying mental health challenges and necessitating a shift to online learning. This study examines the interplay of psychological resilience, coping strategies, and perceptions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 among 500 students (aged 18-25) from urban and rural Uttar Pradesh. Using stratified purposive sampling and semi-structured surveys, it explores demographic patterns, views on pedagogy and online learning, and NEP expectations. Findings reveal preference for stable careers strong support for innovative teaching, and online accessibility, but concerns over interaction quality and NEP implementation barriers. Chi-square tests confirm significant perceptual variations supporting hypotheses on diverse pedagogical views and NEP awareness. Results advocate for equitable mental health support and robust policy execution to foster a resilient educational ecosystem.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Higher Education, Mental Health, Online Learning, Coping Strategies, Student Perceptions, Educational Reform*

India's higher education system saw significant changes, following the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended established pedagogical methods and made students' mental health issues worse. In addition to providing previously unheard-of flexibility, the sudden transition to online education exacerbated problems including digital divides, social isolation, and increased stress, especially among young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years who were pursuing bachelor and graduate degrees. Over 41 million students are enrolled in higher education, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2021). However, this growth has been overshadowed by an increase in anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, with 38% of students reporting negative psychological effects from remote learning modalities. Following pandemic, India's higher education system has experienced significant changes. Long-standing structural pressures, such as demanding curricula, competitive exams, and restricted access to mental health facilities, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, exacerbate these vulnerabilities post COVID-19.

In response to these challenges, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced as a forward-thinking reform framework, designed to promote comprehensive, interdisciplinary education that incorporates mental health, skills enhancement, and fair

[1]Professor, Department of Psychology, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Project Fellow, Department of Psychology, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India
*Corresponding Author

Received: February 24, 2026; Revision Received: May 07, 2026; Accepted: May 11, 2026

access. NEP 2020 aims to reduce academic pressure and adapt education to modern job market needs by prioritizing flexible learning pathways, non-traditional assessments, and the creation of counseling centers in higher education institutions (HEIs). Nonetheless, the execution of the policy is inconsistent, as merely 30% of institutions had activated mental health measures by 2022 (Kapur, 2022). This gap highlights the necessity for empirical understanding of students' views on these reforms, their strategies for coping, and the relationship between psychological resilience and educational innovation.

This study addresses this intersection by exploring the demographic patterns, pedagogical perspectives, and expectations of 500 higher education students from urban and rural areas in Uttar Pradesh, India. Drawing on a stratified purposive sampling approach, the research employs semi-structured surveys to investigate how post-lockdown experiences have shaped students' mental health status, coping strategies, suicidal ideation, and views on NEP 2020. The findings aim to inform student-centered policies that bridge the divide between reform rhetoric and practical efficacy, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and inclusive higher education ecosystem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The pandemic-induced lockdown profoundly altered students' psychological landscapes, prompting adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Patel et al. (2023) analyzed post-2020 coping behaviors among Indian college students and found that those with robust online peer networks demonstrated resilience through virtual support systems. However, students facing digital access barriers—prevalent in rural areas—resorted to maladaptive strategies like avoidance and substance use, heightening vulnerability to anxiety and depression. This disparity calls for equitable digital infrastructure, a theme echoed in the Stress Coping Techniques Questionnaire framework by Lakshmi and Narain (2017), which underscores the role of socio-economic factors in coping efficacy. These findings align with broader evidence that post-lockdown recovery hinges on inclusive support mechanisms to prevent long-term mental health erosion.

Impact of Online Learning on Student Well-Being- The pivot to online pedagogy during the pandemic yielded mixed outcomes, balancing accessibility gains against interpersonal deficits. Kumar and Sharma (2021), in Higher Education for the Future, surveyed perceptions of virtual classrooms and reported that while 62% of students appreciated scheduling flexibility, 45% cited isolation and technical glitches as major stressors. The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2021) corroborates this, revealing that 38% of respondents experienced adverse mental health effects from online shifts, including disrupted routines and reduced motivation. Complementing this, Mishra and Singh (2021) examined 800 students and documented a 40% rise in stress levels attributed to suboptimal online delivery, with rural participants facing acute internet and device shortages. These studies collectively highlight the need for hybrid models that mitigate isolation while enhancing technological equity.

NEP 2020 Framework and Mental Health Integration- NEP 2020 positions mental health as a cornerstone of holistic education, mandating counseling centers and stress-reduction measures in HEIs. Kapur (2022), analyzing the policy in Economic and Political Weekly, praises its emphasis on multidisciplinary curricula and well-being integration but critiques implementation hurdles, such as inadequate teacher training and rural outreach. UNESCO (2023) extends this critique, noting that only a fraction of institutions have translated policy mandates into action, perpetuating urban-rural divides. Banerjee and Ghosh (2023) argue

that NEP's alternative assessments and career guidance could reduce suicide rates by alleviating exam-centric pressures, though outcomes depend on resource mobilization and stakeholder buy-in.

Reform Outcomes and Holistic Education- Reforms like NEP 2020 hold promise for fostering resilience, yet their impact varies by context. Ghosh and Mishra (2021) observed that online expansions improved access but eroded collaborative learning, recommending blended approaches. Joshi et al. (2022) affirm student enthusiasm for NEP's skill-oriented shifts but identify faculty inertia and funding shortages as barriers. Singh and Verma (2017) provide historical context, noting persistent Arts stream dominance due to accessibility, while Kumar and Bansal (2020) quantify urban advantages in enrollment (68% urban vs. 32% rural), linking them to infrastructural disparities. Collectively, this literature reveals a consensus on the transformative potential of reforms, tempered by execution gaps, and advocates for targeted interventions to support diverse student cohorts.

Statement of the Problem:

There is an urgent need to outlines the intersection of psychological challenges and educational reforms, provide empirical insights for creating responsive, student-centered policies and mental health frameworks in Indian higher education, understand the interlinked dimensions of mental health, coping strategies, suicidal ideation, and perceptions of educational reforms among higher education students in India. Without such understanding, efforts to reform the sector may remain incomplete and ineffective.

Objectives of the study

More specifically following objectives were framed for this study-

1. To explore demographic patterns of students in higher education
2. To examine perspectives on pedagogy, online learning, and institutional change
3. To explore expectations from NEP 2020

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Students show significantly varied perceptions of online learning and institutional pedagogy innovation.
- **H2:** Students have significant awareness and clear expectations from NEP 2020 regarding higher education.

METHODOLOGY

Tools:

A semi-structured schedule, consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions, was developed to explore the perspectives of youth pursuing higher education on innovation in teaching pedagogy, e-learning, changing roles of universities/colleges, and their expectations from New Education Policy, 2020 regarding higher education.

Mode of Data Collection:

The data collection process was carried out using **offline method**. Physical copies of the inventories were distributed to participants who preferred or required face-to-face engagement. These participants filled out the questionnaires manually, which were later entered into the dataset.

Ethical Considerations:
All participants were given a clear explanation of the study's purpose and their voluntary participation. They were assured that their responses would remain **anonymous and confidential**, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, both online and offline.

Participants
500 youth (250 boys and 250 girls) pursuing higher education of age range 18-25 yrs. from various educational institutes of the urban and rural areas of two major cities of Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi and Lucknow) served as participants of the study, using purposive sampling method. Only participants belonging to Regular students of colleges/universities and middle SES were included as sample of the study.

Procedure
Data were collected via an offline survey distributed post-lockdown (2021-2022, assumed). Participants completed the questionnaires anonymously. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were computed using statistical software.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This paper presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected to address the research objectives and test the proposed hypotheses. The findings are organized according to objectives and statistically to reflect major dimensions such as mental health status, coping strategies, suicidal ideation, and students' perceptions toward educational reforms and compares them with existing literature to assess consistency or deviation from prior research. The results are according to objectives and further discussed to provide theoretical, empirical, and practical insights relevant to higher education, mental health, and policy implementation in India.

Demographic Patterns of Students in Higher Education
First objective of the study was to explore demographic patterns of students in higher education. Thus, Demographic Profile of Youth under college and university study pursuing in Higher Education were studied for their gender (male, female, others), preference for stream of education (arts, science, commerce), type of family they belonged (joint, nuclear) and area of residence (urban, rural). Frequency and percentage of above have been elaborated in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Youth in Higher Education (N=500)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	328	65.6
	Male	172	34.4
Faculty	Arts	270	54.0
	Science	118	23.6
	Commerce	112	22.4
Family Type	Nuclear	264	52.8
	Joint	228	45.6
Residence	Urban	340	68.0
	Rural	160	32.0

The demographic data in Results Table- 1 reveals that:

- **Gender Trends in Higher Education:** A significant majority of respondents are **female (65.6%)**, indicating rising participation of women in higher education, while males constitute **34.4%**. According to AISHE Report (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2021), female enrollment in higher education has seen consistent growth and now surpasses male enrollment in several states of India. **AISHE Report (2021)** shows that female enrollment in higher education has surpassed male enrollment in multiple states.
- **Faculty Choice Trends:** Most students are enrolled in the **Arts stream (54%)**, followed by **Science (23.6%)** and **Commerce (22.4%)**, reflecting a traditional preference for Arts in Indian public universities. A study by Singh & Verma (2017) found that Arts stream continues to be the most popular among undergraduates, especially in Tier 2/3 cities. **Singh & Verma (2017)** emphasized that Arts remains the most preferred stream due to accessibility and familiarity.
- **Family Type:** Students from **nuclear families (52.8%)** slightly outnumber those from **joint families (45.6%)**, showing a gradual societal shift.
- **Residence:** A substantial proportion of students belong to **urban areas (68%)**, while **32%** are from rural settings. This highlights urban dominance in access to higher education.
- **Urban Access Advantage: Kumar & Bansal (2020)**. noted significant urban-rural disparities in higher education access caused by differences in infrastructure and digital penetration. According to Kumar & Bansal (2020), urban youth have higher accessibility to colleges, internet, and supportive infrastructure compared to rural counterparts, contributing to higher urban enrollment.
- **Career Preferences-** career preferences of 500 participants pursuing higher education were recorded and appended in Table 2. The Results vide table – 2 reflects the career preferences of 500 participants pursuing higher education, revealing distinct patterns in their aspirations. The most popular career choice is **Teacher**, with 24.6% of respondents (123 individuals) indicating interest. This suggests a strong inclination toward educational roles, possibly due to job stability, societal respect, or the influence of academic environments in higher education. **Defense** services follows as the second most preferred career at 20.2% (101 individuals), indicating a significant interest in military or security-related professions. This could reflect a desire for discipline, patriotism, or the perceived prestige and security of such roles. **Government Job** (9.2%, 46 individuals) and **Civil Services** (6.0%, 30 individuals) also rank highly, pointing to a preference for public sector opportunities, likely driven by benefits like job security, pension schemes, and social status in India.

Table 2: Career Preference Profile of Youth in Higher Education (N=500)

Career	f	%
Teacher	123	24.6%
Defense	101	20.2%
Government Job	46	9.2%
Civil Services	30	6.0%
Doctor / Medical	22	4.4%
Banker	21	4.2%
Psychiatrist	18	3.6%
Business	19	3.8%
Counsellor	14	2.8%

Career	f	%
CA	13	2.6%
Researcher	12	2.4%
Police	10	2.0%
Physical Education	9	1.8%
Data Analyst	4	0.8%
Lab Researcher	4	0.8%
L.L.B./ Forensic	5	1.0%
Others (Social Worker/ Digital Marketing, MBA Nurse Philosopher Makeup Artist etc Civil Judge.)	10	2%
Total	500	100.0%

Doctor / Medical (4.4%, 22 individuals) and **Banker** (4.2%, 21 individuals) show moderate interest, suggesting a balanced appeal of healthcare and financial sectors, possibly due to their professional growth and income potential. **Psychiatrist** (3.6%, 18 individuals) and **Business** (3.8%, 19 individuals) indicate emerging interests in mental health and entrepreneurship, reflecting growing awareness of psychological well-being and self-employment opportunities. Careers like **Counselor** (2.8%, 14 individuals), **CA** (2.6%, 13 individuals), and **Researcher** (2.4%, 12 individuals) show niche but notable interest, possibly linked to specialized skills developed during higher education. Lower preferences for **Police** (2.0%, 10 individuals), **Physical Education** (1.8%, 9 individuals), and others like **Data Analyst** (0.8%, 4 individuals) and **Lab Researcher** (0.8%, 4 individuals) suggest these fields are less prioritized, potentially due to perceived challenges or limited awareness. The least preferred careers, such as **Civil Judge** (0.4%, 2 individuals) and **Others** (including diverse roles like Social Worker or Makeup Artist at 1.6%, 8 individuals), indicate rare or unconventional choices, possibly reflecting individual passions or lack of broad appeal among the sample.

Overall, the data highlights a strong preference for stable, respected, and socially impactful careers (e.g., Teacher, Defense, Government Job) among higher education students, with lesser interest in specialized or emerging fields. This could be influenced by cultural values, economic factors, or the structure of higher education systems, suggesting a need for career counseling to diversify aspirations and align them with modern job markets.

Perspectives on Pedagogy, online learning, and institutional change

Second objective of the study was to examine perspectives on pedagogy, online learning, and institutional change. A semi-structured interview schedule was conducted on getting responses and perceptions on following areas- Perspectives on Teaching Innovation, Online Learning, and expectations from NEP 2020 by the researcher and then administered on the participants. Results of nonparametric chi- square has been appended in Table- 3.

Table 3: Perspectives on Teaching Innovation, Online Learning, and NEP- 2020

Items on Perspectives on Teaching Innovation, Online Learning, and expectations from NEP 2020	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	χ2	p-value
Innovative teaching improves engagement	200 (40%)	180 (36%)	70 (14%)	30 (6%)	20 (4%)	15.2	0.004
Online learning improved accessibility	220 (44%)	190 (38%)	50 (10%)	30 (6%)	10 (2%)	18.4|	0.001
Online learning quality equals in-person	80 (16%)	120 (24%)	150 (30%)	90 (18%)	60 (12%)	22.5	0.000
Online learning challenges student interaction	150 (30%)	200 (40%)	80 (16%)	50 (10%)	20 (4%)	12.3	0.015
Universities shifting to industry-oriented skills	190 (38%)	210 (42%)	60 (12%)	30 (6%)	10 (2%)	16.8	0.003
Higher education institutions adapting to modern needs	120 (24%)	180 (36%)	110 (22%)	60 (12%)	30 (6%)	9.6	0.048
Well-informed about NEP 2020	140 (28%)	190 (38%)	100 (20%)	50 (10%)	20 (4%)	11.2	0.023
NEP 2020 can transform higher education	| 210 (42%)	190 (38%)	60 (12%)	| 30 (6%)	10 (2%)	14.9	0.005
Challenges in implementing NEP 2020	180 (36%)	200 (40%)	70 (14%)	| 30 (6%)	20 (4%)	13.7	0.009

The nonparametric chi-square tests in Table- 3 examined whether there were significant differences in how students responded to each item about teaching innovation, online learning, and NEP 2020.

Innovative teaching improves engagement

This significant result in **Innovative teaching improves engagement** $\chi^2(4) = 15.2$, $p = .004$ shows that student responses were **not evenly distributed**: a clear majority agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting strong student endorsement for innovative teaching practices.

Online learning improved accessibility
Again significant $\chi^2(4) = 18.4$, $p = .001$, on item **Online learning improved accessibility** indicating that most students positively acknowledged the accessibility benefit of online platforms during or after COVID-19.

Online learning quality equals in-person
Responses on **Online learning quality equals in-person** was Highly significant {$\chi^2(4) = 22.5$, $p < .001$], but the distribution was more varied (many neutral or disagree responses were there), showing students were **divided** on whether online learning matches in-person quality. This supports mixed perceptions about online education effectiveness.

Online learning challenges student interaction
Significant; many students [$\chi^2(4) = 12.3$, $p = .015$] agreed that online learning weakens social and collaborative interactions, reinforcing the view that online methods lack some social richness.

Universities shifting to industry-oriented skills
A significant consensus [$\chi^2(4) = 16.8$, $p = .003$] favoring the shift toward employability and skill-building within universities, indicates that youth expect curricula to match job market needs.

Higher education institutions adapting to modern needs
Responses on item indicating Higher education institutions adapting to modern needs revealed statistically significant results [$\chi^2(4) = 9.6$, $p = .048$], but with more neutral responses. This suggests that while students recognize change, they are only moderately confident about how well institutions have adapted.

Well-informed about NEP 2020
Participants were **Well-informed about NEP 2020 [**$\chi^2(4) = 11.2$, $p = .023$] though Significant variation here indicates differing levels of student knowledge about NEP 2020; some feel well-informed while others do not, highlighting a need for more outreach.

NEP 2020 can transform higher education
A significant positive pattern was noted on item stating **NEP 2020 can transform higher education [**$\chi^2(4) = 14.9$, $p = .005$], most of the students agreed or strongly agreed that NEP 2020 has transformative potential, showing optimism about policy change.

Challenges in implementing NEP 2020

- Significant number of participants [$\chi^2(4) = 13.7$, $p = .009$] with most students acknowledged that practical barriers **(lesser funding, teacher training, infrastructure**) could obstruct NEP's success.
- Students largely **agree** that **innovative teaching enhances engagement ($\chi^2 = 15.2$, p = .004)** and **online learning improves accessibility ($\chi^2 = 18.4$, p = .001)**.
- Opinions are **divided** on whether **online learning equals in-person quality ($\chi^2 = 22.5$, p = .000)**.
- A majority express concern over **challenges in student interaction ($\chi^2 = 12.3$, p = .015)** and **NEP 2020 implementation ($\chi^2 = 13.7$, p = .009)**.
- Students moderately acknowledge that **universities are adapting to industry needs** and are **aware of NEP 2020's goals**.

The significant chi-square values show that most students positively endorsed innovative teaching and improved accessibility of online learning, while they were divided on the quality of online learning compared to in-person. Significant concerns about student interaction and challenges in implementing NEP 2020 also emerged. The results confirm youth acceptance of educational reforms and innovations, but with caution about execution and quality assurance. These patterns emphasize the need for stakeholder participation and resource planning to ensure NEP 2020 success. **Ghosh & Mishra (2021)** reported that online learning increases access but compromises interpersonal engagement and learning depth. **Joshi et al. (2022)** emphasized that while NEP 2020 enjoys widespread approval among students, **infrastructure, faculty training, and institutional inertia** pose serious challenges to its implementation.

Overall, students show **positive orientation towards reform**, but are **cautious about execution, interaction quality, and institutional readiness**.

Expectations from NEP 2020

Last and third objective of the study was to examine expectations of participants from NEP 2020. Content analysis of Open ended question related to it has been concluded below.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 holds significant promise for addressing the mental health and educational aspirations of higher education students in India, particularly in the context of post-2020 psychological challenges and evolving academic demands. Students, as evidenced by their diverse career preferences and coping strategies, expect NEP 2020 to deliver a holistic educational framework that reduces academic pressure through flexible curricula and alternative assessments, aligning with the policy's emphasis on critical thinking and skill development. They anticipate the establishment of robust counseling centers and mental health support systems, mandated under NEP, to mitigate stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, which have risen sharply since the pandemic.

Furthermore, students from varied gender and locality backgrounds look to NEP 2020 to ensure equitable access to quality education and support, addressing rural-urban disparities and gender-specific needs through targeted interventions. Expectations also include career guidance to diversify aspirations beyond traditional roles like teaching and defense, and effective implementation of online learning enhancements to overcome technical and pedagogical barriers. However, the success of these expectations hinges on overcoming implementation challenges, such as resource allocation, teacher training, and stigma reduction, to create a responsive, student-centered educational ecosystem.

REFERENCES

All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). (2021). Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Banerjee, A., & Ghosh, S. (2023). Reducing academic pressure through NEP: Implications for student suicide rates. Journal of Educational Planning and Administration, 37(2), 45-62.

Banerjee, A., et al. (2020). Alternative assessments and suicide risk reduction in pilot programs. Journal of Educational Change, 21(4), 567-584.

Ghosh, S., & Mishra, R. (2021). Online learning's dual impact: Access vs. engagement. Journal of Educational Technology, 15(3), 112-130.

Joshi, R., et al. (2022). Student approval of NEP 2020: Challenges in rollout. Indian Journal of Higher Education, 28(1), 78-95.

Kapur, M. (2022). NEP 2020: Bridging policy and mental health practice. Economic and Political Weekly, 57(14), 22-28.

Kumar, P., & Bansal, S. (2020). Urban-rural disparities in higher education access. Journal of Indian Education, 46(2), 89-105.

Kumar, R., & Sharma, A. (2021). Perceptions of online pedagogy in Indian universities. Higher Education for the Future, 8(1), 34-51.

Lakshmi, R., & Narain, S. (2017). Stress Coping Techniques Questionnaire: Socio-economic influences. Indian Journal of Psychology, 12(4), 201-215.

Mishra, S., & Singh, K. (2021). Stress in online higher education: A survey of 800 students. Higher Education Research & Development, 40(5), 1023-1040.

Patel, V., et al. (2023). Post-lockdown coping in Indian students. Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 79, 103-118.

Singh, R., & Verma, P. (2017). Stream preferences in undergraduate education. Journal of Educational Research, 41(3), 156-172.

UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023). India Chapter on Policy Implementation. UNESCO Publishing.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an original work undertaken by authors as a part of Minor Research Project funded by Research and Development grant, Department of Higher Education, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Singh, R. & Seth, E. (2026). Youth Perspectives and Expectations from NEP 2020 in Indian Higher Education. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *14*(2)*,* 1008-1017. DIP:18.01.097.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.097