

Legal Education and Research in the Era of NEP 2020: Reimagining India’s Legal Academia

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1. Introduction

Legal education in India has traditionally been shaped by professional requirements, with the Bar Council of India (BCI) emphasizing doctrinal competence and practice readiness². This approach has often limited interdisciplinary engagement and research orientation within legal academia. While National Law Universities introduced structural and pedagogical innovations, disparities persist across institutions, particularly in curriculum design, research output, and global exposure³.

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant shift by embedding legal education within a multidisciplinary and research-oriented framework⁴. It promotes flexibility, critical thinking, and academic mobility, thereby redefining the purpose of professional education. This article analyzes the impact of NEP 2020 on legal education, focusing on its transformative potential as well as the structural and regulatory challenges affecting its implementation.

2. Historical Evolution of Legal Education in India

Legal education in India originated during the colonial era as vocational training designed to produce legal practitioners for administrative and judicial functions⁵. Post independence reforms led by the Bar Council of India standardized legal education, focusing primarily on minimum professional qualifications and doctrinal instruction⁶.

The establishment of National Law Universities in the late twentieth century marked a shift toward integrated programmes and modest interdisciplinary engagement⁷. However, the majority of law colleges continued to follow traditional teaching methods, with limited emphasis on research and innovation. Reform-oriented reports highlighted systemic deficiencies, including outdated curricula and inadequate infrastructure⁸. These longstanding challenges created the need for comprehensive policy reform, culminating in NEP 2020.

3. Global Context and Comparative Education Reforms

Globally, higher education systems have undergone transformation toward interdisciplinary learning and research productivity. The United Kingdom’s Teaching Excellence Framework and Research Excellence Framework exemplify performance-based academic evaluation⁹.

Legal education has similarly evolved, integrating fields such as technology law and public policy¹⁰. These developments reflect a broader shift toward flexible and research-intensive systems. NEP 2020 aligns with these global trends by promoting multidisciplinary integration and academic mobility, though contextual adaptation remains a challenge.

4. NEP 2020: Vision and Relevance to Legal Education

NEP 2020 envisions a multidisciplinary and research-driven higher education system, introducing mechanisms such as the Academic Bank of Credits and the National Research Foundation.

For legal education, it promotes integration with disciplines such as economics and technology. However, the continued regulatory role of the Bar Council of India creates a dual governance framework. Aligning academic reforms with professional standards remains essential for effective implementation.

5. Curricular Reform and Multidisciplinary Integration

The policy promotes flexible curricula through credit-based systems and interdisciplinary learning. This allows law students to explore emerging fields such as environmental and technology law.

The Academic Bank of Credits enhances academic mobility and modular learning. However, implementation challenges persist due to limited faculty expertise and institutional capacity. Effective reform requires investment in infrastructure and interdisciplinary training.

6. Research Ecosystem and Institutional Development

NEP 2020 emphasizes research through the establishment of the National Research Foundation to support funding and collaboration. This is particularly significant for legal academia, where research output has historically been limited. Institutional disparities remain a concern, with elite institutions better equipped than traditional colleges. Strengthening

research capacity requires sustained funding, faculty development, and institutional support mechanisms.

7. Regulatory Architecture and Structural Challenges

The coexistence of NEP reforms and BCI regulation creates a complex governance structure. While NEP proposes the Higher Education Commission of India, legal education remains under BCI oversight.

This dual system may lead to conflicts in curriculum design and accreditation. Coordinated regulatory reform is necessary to ensure policy coherence and enable institutional innovation.

8. Technology Integration and Pedagogical Innovation

NEP 2020 highlights the role of technology in enhancing education through platforms such as SWAYAM and digital learning systems.

In legal education, technology enables virtual moot courts and online research tools. However, digital divides pose challenges to equitable access. Addressing these disparities is essential for effective implementation.

9. Practical Training and Professional Competence

Practical training remains central to legal education. Clinical programmes, internships, and moot courts play a crucial role in developing professional skills.

While NEP emphasizes flexibility, clearer guidelines are needed to integrate experiential learning within the framework. Regulatory support is essential to balance academic and professional training.

10. Equity, Access, and Institutional Diversity

NEP 2020 prioritizes inclusivity and equitable access to education. In legal education, disparities between institutions must be addressed through targeted policies and funding.

Ensuring access for marginalized groups and strengthening regional institutions are critical for achieving equitable reform outcomes.

11. Implementation Challenges

The implementation of NEP 2020 is constrained by institutional diversity, funding limitations, and faculty shortages.

Digital infrastructure gaps and regulatory fragmentation further complicate reform efforts. Addressing these challenges requires long-term policy commitment and coordinated governance mechanisms.

12. Conclusion

NEP 2020 provides a transformative vision for legal education, emphasizing multidisciplinary learning, research integration, and global engagement.

However, its success depends on regulatory alignment, institutional capacity building, and equitable implementation.

With sustained effort, the policy can significantly reshape India's legal academia.

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