INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN EMERGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Psychological Well-being of Students in the Post-NEP 2020 Era: Challenges, Adaptation, and Resilience

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has marked a transformative shift in India's educational landscape, emphasizing holistic development, flexibility in curriculum, and integration of technology and vocational learning. While these reforms are progressive and future-oriented, they also pose significant challenges to the psychological well-being of students. This research article investigates the psychological effects of NEP 2020, analyzing stress, anxiety, academic burden, and adaptability among students. By employing a mixed-method approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study identifies key mental health challenges faced by students and provides recommendations for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The findings highlight the need for mental health integration within educational policy frameworks to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of NEP 2020.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), psychological well-being, student mental health, academic anxiety, digital fatigue, education reform, resilience, multidisciplinary learning, India, educational psychology, student support systems, career uncertainty, policy implementation

1. Introduction
The education system in India has witnessed a major shift with the introduction of the National Education Policy 2020, aimed at democratizing access to quality education and making it more relevant to the 21st-century learner. NEP 2020 emphasizes [1] competency-based education, interdisciplinary studies, and digital learning. It replaces the traditional 10+2 structure with a 5+3+3+4 curricular framework, introduces mother tongue as the medium of instruction in early years, and promotes vocational training from Grade 6 onward (Ministry of Education, 2020). While the policy is ambitious in its goals, the abrupt implementation and digital shift, especially post-COVID-19, have created mental health challenges for students. Increased academic pressure, screen fatigue, fear of underperformance, and confusion over multidisciplinary subject choices are among the primary stressors affecting students' psychological well-being. This paper examines how these systemic changes impact students' mental health and explores adaptive strategies and institutional roles in promoting psychological resilience.

2. Review of Literature
Singh and Misra (2022) [10] noted that many students reported heightened anxiety levels following the shift to outcome-based learning and internal assessments, which replaced rote memorization and exam-centric systems. According to the NCERT (2021) [8], a national survey indicated that over 32% of school-going children experienced heightened stress levels during the transition to remote learning post-NEP. Basu (2023) [2] emphasized that while multidisciplinary learning opens up opportunities, it has also led to cognitive overload and decision-making paralysis among students, especially those without sufficient career guidance. Furthermore, the lack of emotional literacy training in the new curriculum has left students without tools to manage stress. UNESCO (2021) [11] highlighted that

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[1] Digital Divide and Equity: Many students, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, face difficulties accessing online learning platforms due to poor connectivity and lack of devices, exacerbating educational inequality (Sharma & Rathi, 2021).

global educational transitions must include robust psychological support systems to prevent long-term mental health consequences. In the Indian context, these studies converge to reveal a gap between policy intent and student mental preparedness. Kumar (2025) [4] also argues that long-term adaptation and resilience strategies are crucial not only in climate policy but in educational reforms, as systemic transitions tend to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups such as underprivileged students. His research on resilience in vulnerable countries provides a comparative framework for understanding institutional support mechanisms in periods of structural change (Kumar, 2025a; Kumar, 2025b) [5].

3. Objectives of the Study
1. To examine the psychological impact of NEP 2020 on secondary and undergraduate students.
2. To identify key stressors introduced by the new educational [2] model.
3. To explore the coping mechanisms adopted by students.
4. To suggest policy-level interventions and institutional support strategies to improve student well-being.

4. Research Methodology
4.1 This study employed a mixed-method research design
4.1.1 Quantitative Component: A structured questionnaire was administered to 500 students (300 undergraduate and 200 higher secondary) from both urban and semi-urban regions of India. The survey measured variables such as stress, anxiety, digital fatigue, and resilience using Likert scales.

4.1.2 Qualitative Component: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants, including 20 students and 10 school/college counselors and educators. The interviews explored deeper insights into the emotional challenges and coping strategies in the post-NEP academic environment.

4.1.3 Sampling: Was done using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, socio-economic status, and academic backgrounds. Data analysis involved SPSS for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses.

5. Results and Analysis

Table 1: Psychological Well-being Indicators Among Students Post-NEP (N=500)

Psychological Indicator	% Students Reporting Impact	Major Contributing Factors
Academic Anxiety	61%	New assessment formats, lack of clarity in expectations
Digital Fatigue	49%	Extended screen time, poor ergonomic conditions, isolation
Career Uncertainty	38%	Multidisciplinary choices, lack of career counseling
Increased Motivation	22%	Flexibility in learning paths, choice - based credit system
Psychological Resilience	18%	Hands- on learning, life skills training, peer interaction

5.1 Interpretation
Academic Anxiety was the most prevalent concern, with many students expressing fear about internal assessments and unclear grading rubrics.

Digital Fatigue was exacerbated by continuous online learning without breaks, affecting sleep patterns and social life.

Career Uncertainty stemmed from confusion over subject combinations and a perceived mismatch between interest and employability.

On a positive note, Motivation and Resilience were seen in students who embraced the flexibility and project-based learning of NEP 2020.

6. Discussion
The findings suggest that NEP 2020, while visionary, requires comprehensive psychological scaffolding to support students through this transition. The pressure to perform in unfamiliar formats has led to increased mental health issues, particularly among adolescents and first-generation learners. As Jena (2021) [3] notes, a major gap lies in the lack of teacher training to recognize and manage mental health challenges. Educators often focus solely on curriculum delivery, neglecting emotional support. In contrast, systems like Finland integrate mental health professionals into educational teams, demonstrating improved student outcomes (UNESCO, 2021) [3]. Furthermore, students from lower-income households reported higher digital fatigue due to shared devices and poor connectivity. Gender also played a role: female students reported higher stress related to performance and digital safety.

7. Recommendations
1. Institutional Mental Health Programs: Introduce in-house counseling centers and peer support groups.
2. Training for Educators: Mandatory mental health literacy workshops to help teachers identify and address student distress.
3. Policy Adjustments: NEP guidelines should be revised to include psychological preparedness as a metric of educational success.
4. Digital Wellness Strategies: Encourage screen-time limits, promote outdoor learning, and blend offline activities with online modules.
5. Career Mentorship: Develop digital platforms and local mentorship programs for guiding students on subject selection and career paths.

8. Conclusion
The NEP 2020 presents a transformative opportunity for Indian education but also surfaces significant psychological challenges. Without proactive interventions, the stress induced by these reforms could undermine their intended

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[2] Screen Fatigue: Digital fatigue is not solely a technological issue but a psychosocial one, affecting concentration, mood regulation, and interpersonal relationships among adolescents (UNESCO, 2021).

[3] Career Ambiguity Post-NEP: The freedom to choose interdisciplinary subjects often creates stress among students unfamiliar with self-directed academic planning, increasing their reliance on external counseling (Basu, 2023).

Mental Health Policy Gap: Despite NEP 2020's progressive educational outlook, it lacks an embedded mental health framework, making institutional support largely optional and inconsistent across regions (Jena, 2021).

benefits. A resilient educational system is one that prioritizes mental well-being alongside academic excellence. Future research should longitudinally track the impact of NEP reforms and the effectiveness of mental health support mechanisms.

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