

Holistic Learning Revisited: NEP 2020, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Employability Orientation of Commerce and Management Undergraduates in Goa

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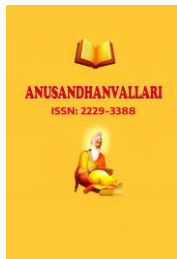
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Abstract: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 does not present itself as an act of modernisation borrowed from elsewhere. It presents itself as a return to India's own intellectual inheritance, invoking the multidisciplinary, experientially grounded learning traditions historically associated with centres such as Takshashila and Nalanda. This paper examines how that self-framing intersects with a contemporary institutional concern: the perceived employability of undergraduate students. Drawing on a survey of 612 final-year Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students across government, government-aided, and private colleges in Goa, all studying under the NEP 2020 curriculum and possessing internship exposure, the paper presents a descriptive profile of respondents' demographic and institutional distribution, internship duration, and career intentions, and reads these patterns against NEP 2020's own account of holistic, skill-integrated education. The discussion is situated within the Ministry of Education's 2023 guidelines mandating credit-bearing Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) courses in undergraduate curricula, which operationalise, in institutional terms, the same revivalist logic underlying NEP 2020's employability provisions. The paper works at a conceptual and descriptive level rather than testing a structural model, and argues that NEP 2020's employability provisions function as a present-day institutional expression of an older Indian pedagogical premise: that learning and practical readiness for the world were never meant to be separated. It closes by considering what this framing implies for how Indian higher education institutions discuss, and design for, graduate employability.

Keywords: NEP 2020; Indian Knowledge Systems; graduate employability; holistic education; B.Com and BBA students; Goa

1. Introduction

Graduate employability is a central concern for higher education systems worldwide, driven by persistent employer reports of a gap between what graduates know and what workplaces require (Jackson, 2015; Tomlinson, 2017). Much of the resulting scholarship treats employability as a universal, largely Western-derived construct, built around notions such as human capital, career self-management, and self-perceived competence (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Clarke, 2018). India's NEP 2020 engages with this same concern but frames its response differently: rather than presenting multidisciplinary, skill-integrated, experiential education as an import, the policy describes it as a recovery of principles already present in India's own historical institutions of learning (Aithal & Aithal, 2020). This framing is not confined to rhetoric. The Ministry of Education's 2023 directive requires undergraduate and postgraduate students to complete Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) coursework amounting to at least five per cent of total credits, with at least half of that allocation tied to the student's major discipline (Ministry of Education, 2023). This paper reads NEP 2020's revivalist self-framing as an object of enquiry, asking what it means to treat the policy's employability provisions (internship embedding, skill-based courses, industry engagement) as continuous with an older account of what learning is



for, rather than as a recent policy borrowing. The discussion is grounded in a descriptive account of 612 B.Com and BBA students studying under NEP 2020 in Goa, all of whom have completed an internship as part of their programme.

2. NEP 2020's Invocation of India's Learning Traditions

NEP 2020 anchors its case for holistic and multidisciplinary education in the example of ancient Indian institutions of learning, citing universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila as places where the arts, sciences, and practical crafts were studied together rather than in isolation (Ministry of Education, 2020; Mahesh et al., 2023). The policy treats this integrated approach as India's historical norm, and its fragmentation into narrow disciplines as a recent departure. Hajam et al. (2025) trace this argument further, showing that Nalanda and Takshashila brought together fields as varied as philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and governance within a single institutional setting, a deliberate cultural foundation for holistic learning rather than an incidental feature of premodern education. K. Kasturirangan, who chaired the drafting committee, described the resulting vision in similar terms, characterising NEP 2020 as an integrated yet flexible approach in which holistic, multidisciplinary learning is foundational at every level (Press Trust of India, 2020). Internships, skill-based courses, and industry interaction are not framed in NEP 2020 as employability add-ons layered onto an otherwise purely academic curriculum. They are framed as a restoration of an integration that, on the policy's own account, once existed as a matter of course, a form of educational revivalism rather than reform by importation (Gupta & Maurya, 2026). The Ministry's 2023 guidelines carry this logic into practice: universities must embed IKS electives across all disciplines so that learners are imbued with, in the Ministry's phrase, 'traditional knowledge and pride,' regardless of their chosen field of study (Ministry of Education, 2023).

3. From Integrated Learning to Employability: A Conceptual Bridge

Claiming a direct historical continuity between ancient Indian pedagogy and the psychological constructs used in contemporary employability research would overreach the available evidence. A more modest interpretive claim is possible instead. NEP 2020's narrative of integrated learning gives Indian higher education institutions a vocabulary for discussing employability that does not need to be borrowed wholesale from Western human-capital or career-management traditions, a point that connects to wider debates in higher-education scholarship about whose knowledge systems get treated as the default (Hall & Tandon, 2017). Balchandani (2026) makes a related argument, proposing that Indian Knowledge Systems can serve as a foundation for value-based learning that supports ethical grounding, cultural continuity, and employability together, while noting that epistemological resistance and uneven teacher preparedness complicate this integration in practice. Aydin, S., and Kadioğlu, G. (2024) Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their capacity to execute tasks successfully (Bandura, 1997), and work readiness, the preparedness of graduates to meet workplace demands (Caballero & Walker, 2010), describe in contemporary psychological terms much the same concern that NEP 2020 attributes to its historical exemplars: that learning should leave a person equipped to act competently in the world, not merely informed about it. Internship exposure and skill-based coursework under NEP 2020 are, on this reading, the policy's chosen instruments for realising an older, more integrated idea of what education is meant to produce, consistent with evidence that curricular and workplace-based activities carry different weight in building perceived employability (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). A study applying structural equation modelling to NEP-aligned curricular reform elsewhere in India found that curriculum flexibility and experiential learning significantly predict student engagement and skill development, which in turn shape perceived employability (IJIRT, 2025a). That finding offers indirect empirical support for treating NEP's integrative philosophy and its employability provisions as conceptually linked. This paper uses that link as a lens for reading a descriptive profile of students, not as a hypothesis to be tested statistically.

4. Study Context and Method

The data reported here come from a survey of undergraduate B.Com and BBA students studying under the NEP 2020 curriculum in Goa, India. Respondents were purposively sampled from government, government-aided, and private (self-financed) colleges on two criteria: enrolment in a B.Com or BBA programme under NEP 2020, and completion of an internship as part of that programme. A structured, validated questionnaire covering industry-academia collaboration, internship experience, perceived academic support, students' skills, self-efficacy, work readiness, and perceived employability was administered. Of 700 questionnaires distributed, 655 were returned (93.6 per cent); 43 were rejected at the screening stage, leaving 612 retained for analysis, an effective response rate of 87.4 per cent. This paper draws only on the descriptive, demographic layer of that dataset. The structural relationships among the constructs named above, including the mediating roles of self-efficacy and work readiness, fall outside the scope of this paper and are examined through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling elsewhere. Balkrishna et al. (2024)

5. Descriptive Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic and background characteristics of the 612 respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	243	39.7
	Female	369	60.3
	Total	612	100.0
Academic Programme	BBA	208	34.0
	B.Com	404	66.0
	Total	612	100.0
College Type	Government College	171	27.9
	Government-Aided College	319	52.1
	Private (Self-Financed) College	122	19.9
	Total	612	100.0
Internship Duration	Less than 1 month	355	58.0
	1–2 months	36	5.9
	3–4 months	25	4.1
	More than 4 months	196	32.0
	Total	612	100.0
Career Intention	Full-time employment	167	27.3
	Start own business	86	14.1
	Higher studies	266	43.5

	Government job preparation	50	8.2
	Not decided yet	43	7.0
	Total	612	100.0
Residence	Rural	343	56.0
	Urban	269	44.0
	Total	612	100.0

Source: Survey data, N = 612.

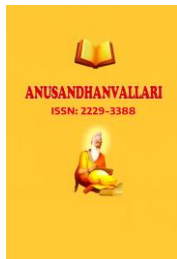
Table 1 note: All demographic and background figures are drawn from the single verified dataset used for this study.

Female respondents outnumbered male respondents, at 60.3 per cent against 39.7 per cent. Two-thirds of respondents (66.0 per cent) were enrolled in B.Com and one-third (34.0 per cent) in BBA. Government-aided colleges accounted for the largest share (52.1 per cent), followed by government colleges (27.9 per cent) and private, self-financed colleges (19.9 per cent), a distribution that reflects the actual composition of B.Com/BBA provision in Goa under NEP 2020 rather than an imposed quota. All respondents had completed an internship, but the duration of that exposure was polarised: 58.0 per cent completed internships of less than one month, while 32.0 per cent completed internships lasting more than four months, and comparatively few respondents (10.0 per cent combined) fell in the intermediate one-to-four-month range. Higher studies was the single largest stated career goal (43.5 per cent), ahead of full-time employment (27.3 per cent), government job preparation (8.2 per cent), and starting a business (14.1 per cent). A slight majority of respondents (56.0 per cent) reported a rural residence.

6. Discussion: Reading the Profile Through an Indigenous Lens

NEP 2020's account of integrated learning assumes a reasonably uniform and substantial exposure to the practical, experiential component of education, with internships as the most direct such mechanism available to B.Com and BBA students. The polarised distribution of internship duration observed here complicates that assumption. A majority of students experienced an internship of under a month, difficult to reconcile with the sustained, integrative exposure to workplace practice that the policy's historical framing implies, while a substantial minority experienced considerably longer placements. Comparative research on work-integrated learning finds that the form and length of workplace exposure, not merely its presence on a transcript, shapes graduates' perceived readiness for employment (Jackson & Dean, 2023). Set against the Goa data, this sharpens rather than resolves the tension: the translation of NEP 2020's integrated ideal into everyday institutional practice remains a work in progress, shaped by college type, industry access, and local placement infrastructure rather than by curriculum design alone. Structural constraints of exactly this kind, examination-driven pedagogy, industry-academia disconnects, infrastructural inequalities, and uneven faculty readiness, have been documented elsewhere in India as persistent obstacles to NEP 2020's implementation, even where its stated ambitions are broadly welcomed (IJIRT, 2025b). The pattern observed in Goa is therefore unlikely to be a purely local one.

The pattern of career intentions adds a further layer. If NEP 2020's employability provisions operated in a straightforwardly linear fashion, with internship exposure feeding directly into readiness for, and orientation toward, immediate employment, full-time employment might be expected to dominate stated career intentions.



Instead, higher studies was the more common goal. This does not necessarily point to a failure of the policy's employability aims; it may instead reflect a labour market in which further qualification is treated as complementary to, rather than a substitute for, practical exposure. What it does show is that perceived employability and immediate employment intention are distinct, a distinction that stakeholder-focused reviews of the employability literature treat as a recurring source of confusion in policy discussions (Cheng et al., 2022). Institutions should therefore avoid treating internship participation as a proxy for employment readiness without also attending to how students interpret their own post-graduation options. A recent multi-state study reports that stronger skill-oriented curricular exposure under NEP 2020, including internships and soft-skill training, is associated with a lower stated intention among Indian graduates to seek employment abroad (IJCRT, 2026). This suggests students may read NEP 2020's employability logic less as a route to any job and more as a route to a viable career within India, a reading compatible with the preference for further study seen in the present sample. Barrabeitg, G. L. (2024)

The concentration of respondents in government-aided colleges (52.1 per cent) matters for how an indigenous, integration-oriented reading of NEP 2020 might be put into practice. Government-aided institutions operate with different resource constraints, industry linkages, and administrative flexibility than either fully government-run or private, self-financed colleges. For NEP 2020's vision of integrated, practically grounded learning to be realised evenly across the sector, government-aided colleges, the largest single provider category in this sample, warrant particular attention in any effort to standardise and lengthen internship exposure. The gender composition of the sample, skewed toward female respondents, is broadly consistent with enrolment patterns reported for B.Com and BBA programmes in Goa and does not appear to bear directly on the argument advanced here, though it invites further empirical attention to whether internship access or duration differs by gender.

The Ministry's 2023 mandate that IKS coursework be credit-bearing rather than co-curricular, with at least half of the allocated credits tied to a student's own discipline, adds a further dimension (Ministry of Education, 2023). For B.Com and BBA students, this means indigenous knowledge content is meant to be woven into commerce and management coursework itself, not offered only as a generic elective. Read against the findings reported here, this raises a question for future research: whether students who have completed discipline-linked IKS credits report different levels of self-efficacy or perceived employability than those who have not. The present descriptive dataset was not designed to answer that question.

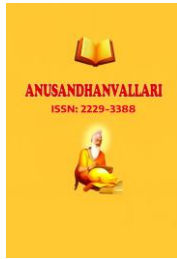
7. Conclusion and Implications

NEP 2020 frames holistic, multidisciplinary, and practically integrated education as a recovery of India's own historical practice rather than an imported policy solution. This gives Indian higher education institutions a distinctive vocabulary for discussing graduate employability, one that does not need to be borrowed wholesale from Western human-capital traditions. The descriptive evidence presented here, drawn from 612 B.Com and BBA students in Goa, shows that the translation of this vision into practice is currently uneven: internship exposure is polarised rather than uniform, career intentions lean toward further study rather than immediate employment, and provision is concentrated in government-aided colleges whose capacity to deliver sustained practical exposure may vary. None of this undermines the conceptual case for reading NEP 2020's employability provisions through an indigenous, integration-oriented lens. It indicates instead where institutional effort needs to be directed if that vision is to be realised in practice rather than remain a matter of policy language. Future research may examine the structural relationships among internship experience, self-efficacy, work readiness, and perceived employability in this same population, offering a more mechanistic account of the pathways described here only at the descriptive level.



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