NEP 2020 AND LIBRARIES: EMERGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract :

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions Indian education around multidisciplinary and experiential learning, flexible academic pathways, digital education, research and innovation, Indian languages, inclusion and equity, and lifelong learning. Libraries and Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals hold a place in this agenda that the policy addresses directly: paragraphs 2.8, 21.9 and 21.10 set out a specific mandate for school and public libraries, digital libraries, reading culture, Indian-language resources, mobile and children's libraries, and professional development of library staff. This paper examines how that mandate is playing out across school, higher education, public and community library settings, drawing on national administrative datasets alongside the policy text. UDISE+ 2024-25 data show that while 89.5 per cent of Indian schools report a library, reading corner or book bank, only 6.9 per cent have a dedicated digital library, revealing a wide gap between physical provision and digital readiness. AISHE 2023-24 records a higher education enrolment of 4.50 crore and a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 30.0 per cent, well short of NEP 2020's 50 per cent target for 2035. National digital infrastructure, NDLI, ONOS, e-ShodhSindhu and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya, has multiplied nominal access to resources, but converting access into use depends on LIS professionals for discovery, authentication, training and information literacy support. The paper also traces LIS work expanding into digital resource management, bibliometrics, multilingual and Indian Knowledge Systems documentation, accessible service design, and cautious AI adoption. Public libraries, numbering over 46,000, remain an under-examined channel for lifelong learning. The paper closes with a seven-point roadmap, arguing that the binding constraint is implementation capacity rather than conceptual direction.

Keywords : NEP 2020; Library and Information Science; digital libraries; information literacy; National Digital Library of India; One Nation One Subscription; e-ShodhSindhu; Indian Knowledge Systems; public libraries; Indian languages; artificial intelligence; higher education; school libraries; digital education.

Introduction :

India's National Education Policy 2020 is the first comprehensive restatement of national education policy since 1986, and it treats libraries as an explicit instrument of policy rather than as background infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy's stated commitments to multidisciplinary and experiential learning, flexible entry and exit pathways, digital education, research and innovation, the use of Indian languages, inclusion and equity, and lifelong learning cannot be delivered through classroom instruction alone; each depends, in different ways, on access to organized, discoverable and usable information resources. NEP 2020 directly acknowledges this dependence. Libraries are associated with the development of reading habits throughout the school years and paragraphs 21.9 and 21.10 mandate the expansion of public and school libraries, the strengthening of digital libraries, the building of collections in Indian languages, the expansion of mobile and children's library services and investment in the training of library staff (Ministry of Education, 2020). For the Library and Information Science professional, this policy language redefines the job. The profession's traditional core, comprising collection development, classification and cataloguing, circulation and reference work, does not disappear under NEP 2020, but it is joined by a widening set of expectations: digital resource management, information literacy instruction, bibliometric and research-impact services, institutional repository and research-data management, support for open access and scholarly communication, multilingual and accessible service delivery, and increasingly, informed engagement with artificial intelligence tools. A growing body of Indian and international literature has begun to document this shift, generally converging on the view that NEP 2020 expands rather than diminishes the institutional and professional standing of libraries (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023; Kotur, Jayamma, & Mahesh, 2023; Soni, 2023).

What the existing literature has been slower to establish is the scale of the gap between what NEP 2020 asks of libraries and what national data show libraries currently able to deliver. Much of the published commentary is descriptive or conceptual, working from the policy text and from survey or interview evidence collected within single institutions, and it does not always connect the policy's ambitions to nationally representative administrative data on school, higher-education and public library infrastructure. This paper addresses that gap. It combines a reading of the relevant provisions of NEP 2020 with four national datasets, UDISE+ 2024-25 for school education, AISHE 2023-24 for higher education, INFLIBNET and the National Digital Library of India for digital infrastructure, and Rural and Regional Reference Library Foundation (RRRLF) data for public libraries, to give an evidence-based account of where LIS professionals stand in relation to the policy's stated direction.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 sets out the specific policy basis for libraries within NEP 2020. Section 3 reviews the relevant literature on library roles under the policy. Section 4 describes the data sources and analytical approach. Section 5 presents findings across school libraries, higher education libraries, national digital infrastructure, Indian-language and Indian Knowledge Systems work, inclusive services, the changing professional role, artificial intelligence, and public libraries. Section 6 discusses the pattern

that emerges across these findings, and Section 7 proposes a practical roadmap for LIS practice. Sections 8 and 9 set out limitations and conclusions.

NEP 2020: Policy Context for Libraries and LIS Practice :

NEP 2020 structures its reform agenda around a few cross-cutting commitments that are reiterated throughout the document: multidisciplinary and experiential learning, flexible learning pathways, digital education, research and innovation, the strengthening of Indian languages, inclusion and equity, and lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). While none of these commitments are library-specific, each has direct implications for how information resources need to be organized, discovered and delivered, which is why the policy returns to libraries at several points rather than treating them as a single, self-contained chapter.

Paragraph 2.8 makes reading culture an explicit school-level objective, and links it to the availability of school libraries, positioning the library as foundational to language development and the reading habit rather than as an auxiliary facility. Paragraphs 21.9 and 21.10 extend this into a broader library mandate covering the expansion of public and school libraries, the strengthening of digital libraries, the promotion of reading culture, the availability of books and reading material in Indian languages, the extension of mobile libraries into rural areas, the development of children's libraries and programming, and investment in the professional development of library staff and in technology-enabled library services (Ministry of Education, 2020). Read together, these provisions give LIS professionals a policy mandate that is unusually specific by comparison with earlier Indian education policy, which tended to mention libraries only in passing (Dasgupta, 2005).

The policy also sets numerical targets that indirectly determine the scale at which libraries must operate. NEP 2020 targets universal access to school education by 2030 and a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 50 per cent in higher education by 2035, alongside the introduction of multiple entry and exit points, an Academic Bank of Credits, and expanded online and blended learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). Each of these targets translates into a demand on library services: universal school access implies universal reading and library access; a higher GER implies a larger and more diverse population of learners requiring library-mediated resources; and flexible, credit-based, partly online pathways imply that library access can no longer be designed around a single, campus-based, full-time student.

Literature Review :

The literature on NEP 2020 and libraries is still young, but it is already large enough to show a consistent pattern. Indian policy-analysis and review papers published since 2022 converge on the claim that NEP 2020 expands the library's role in higher education by requiring support for multidisciplinary teaching, research and innovation, digital literacy and inclusion (Acharya & Vagdal, 2023; Kotur, Jayamma, & Mahesh, 2023; Asif & Singh, 2022). Parallel work on school and public libraries frames them as learning-resource centres

responsible for reading promotion, inclusion, vernacular access and community engagement, echoing the specific commitments of paragraphs 2.8 and 21.9-21.10 (Soni, 2023; Gupta & Singh, 2025; Joseph & Chinnasamy, 2024).

A second strand of literature is concerned less with what libraries should do than with whether LIS professionals are equipped to do it. Studies of digital competence consistently find that librarians' use of emerging technologies is constrained by the extent of their training, and that professional development remains underfunded relative to the pace of technological change (Hamad, Al-Fadel, & Fakhouri, 2020; Bolasco, 2023; Rehman, Majeed, & Ganaie, 2024). This kind of training gap is reproduced across institutional contexts and countries; it is a structural feature of the profession's transition and not a problem of a single system (Ali, 2022; Hussain, Ali, & Jan, 2025).

A third, more recent, strand concerns artificial intelligence in library work. This literature identifies AI as a potential tool for retrieval, cataloguing, personalization, and research support, but notes low current adoption, unresolved questions of provenance and bias, and a continuing need for professional verification of AI-assisted output (Marchionini, 2024; Khan, Hossain, Biswas, & Islam, 2025; Hossain, 2025). The literature focuses less on whether AI will be adopted and more on whether the profession will have the AI literacy to adopt it responsibly.

A fourth theme places NEP 2020 in the longer history of library policy in India. Earlier reviews of Indian library and information policy have noted the continued lack of an integrated national framework, the unevenness of legislation at the state level, and the fact that library development has not been accompanied by the kind of coordinated planning seen in some other public services (Dasgupta, 2005; Balaji, 2012). Several recent papers argue that this incompleteness has not been fully resolved by NEP 2020 itself: the policy articulates clear directional goals for libraries but leaves the operational detail, funding mechanisms and implementation timelines comparatively open (Bhoir & Vanshiv, 2024; Chitransh Dixit, Dixit, Dixit, & Pandey, 2024).

Together, this literature supports three propositions that this paper tests with national data. First, that NEP 2020 is broadly understood as expanding rather than contracting the institutional role of the library. Secondly, that the profession's ability to fulfil this expanded role is more limited by training, funding and infrastructure than by any difference of view on direction. Third, that much of the evidence that does exist is descriptive or conceptual, drawn from policy analysis, literature review and small-scale survey work, rather than from analysis of nationally representative data. This paper fills the gap of the third: connecting the stated direction of the policy to what the data from UDISE+, AISHE, INFLIBNET, NDLI and RRRLF actually reveal about the current state of library infrastructure.

Methodology :

This paper uses a mixed policy-document and secondary-data analysis design. The

primary policy source is the text of NEP 2020 itself (Ministry of Education, 2020), read for provisions directly or indirectly concerning libraries, reading, digital education and the LIS profession. This reading is supplemented by four national administrative and institutional datasets, chosen because each corresponds to a distinct segment of the library ecosystem that NEP 2020 addresses.

- UDISE+ 2024-25 (Unified District Information System for Education Plus), maintained by the Ministry of Education, for school-level library, computer and internet infrastructure, including the 2021-22 and 2023-24 rounds used to establish a three-year trend.
- AISHE 2023-24 (All India Survey on Higher Education), maintained by the Ministry of Education, for higher-education enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio, gender parity and faculty strength, with the 2014-15 figure used as a ten-year comparison point.
- INFLIBNET Centre (e-ShodhSindhu) and the National Digital Library of India (NDLI, hosted by IIT Kharagpur), together with the official One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) portal, for the scale of nationally networked digital scholarly and reading resources, accessed August 2026.
- RRRLF (Rural and Regional Reference Library Foundation) data, as reported by the Ministry of Culture, for the count and state-wise distribution of public libraries.

Each dataset was thematically coded against the NEP 2020 provisions that it most directly bears upon, following the structure of the policy's own commitments rather than a coding scheme imposed a priori. The mapping is qualitative and interpretive. It is meant to characterize the relationship between stated policy direction and measured infrastructure, not to test a causal hypothesis. Where a dataset has a known limitation, most notably the RRRLF public library count which is based on data collected in 2018-19 and subsequently reported by the Ministry of Culture rather than a current census, this is explicitly stated alongside the figure rather than treated as current. The analysis is purely descriptive and does not seek to establish causal effects of NEP 2020 on library outcomes; the policy is recent enough (and library-specific outcome data sparse enough) that such a claim would not be supportable from the sources used here.

Findings :

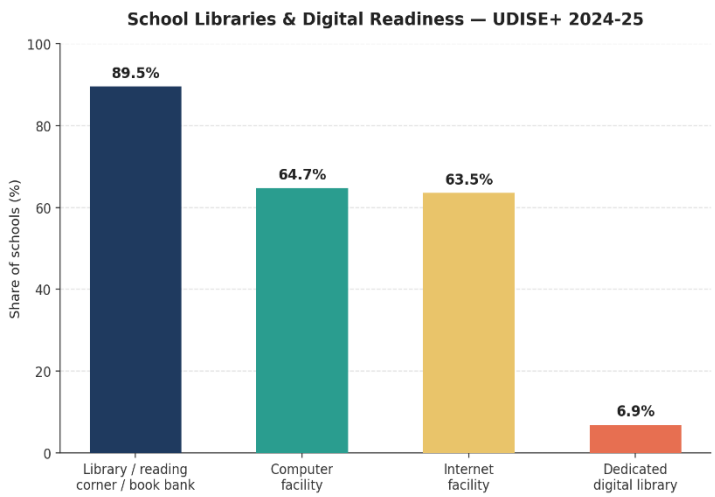
1. School Libraries and the UDISE+ Evidence :

UDISE+ 2024-25 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2025) has information on more than 14.7 lakh schools, 24.69 crore students enrolled and 1.01 crore teachers. Of these schools, 89.5 per cent have a library, reading corner or book bank facility, up from 87.3 per cent in 2021-22, indicating a steady but incremental trend in physical library provision over the last three reporting rounds. Computer facilities are reported in 64.7 per cent of schools and internet facilities in 63.5 per cent, both well below the level of physical library coverage.

The most notable difference in the dataset is for dedicated digital library facilities,

reported in only 6.9 per cent of schools. This is not only a lag behind physical library coverage, but close to an order of magnitude difference, and it persists even when computer and internet facilities are available in about two-thirds of schools. The implication is that the constraint on school digital libraries is not primarily connectivity or hardware, since both of those are considerably more widespread than the 6.9 per cent figure, but rather the absence of curated digital library content, systems and staff capacity to operate a digital library service once the underlying infrastructure exists. Figure 1 and Figure 2, below, present these indicators and the coverage trend graphically.

Indicator (UDISE+ 2024-25)	Coverage
Schools reporting library / reading corner / book bank	89.5%
Schools with computer facility	64.7%
Schools with internet facility	63.5%
Schools reporting a dedicated digital library	6.9%
Library / reading-corner coverage, 2021-22 (comparison)	87.3%



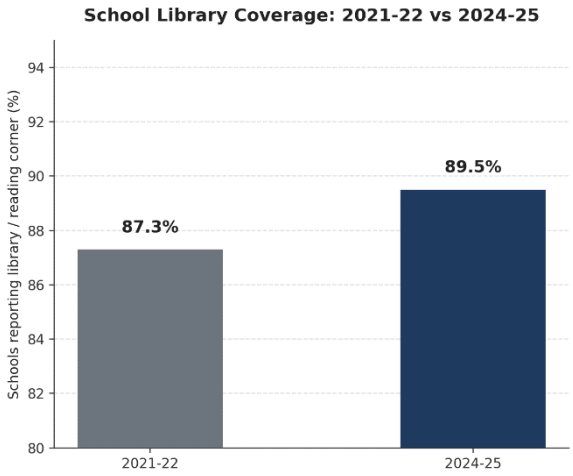


Figure 1: School Library, Computer and Internet Facility Indicators, UDISE+ 2024-25
Figure 2: School Library / Reading-Corner Coverage Trend, 2021-22 vs 2024-25 (UDISE+)

For school librarians, this pattern shifts the practical content of the job. Where the role has traditionally emphasized collection management, issue-and-return circulation, shelving and basic reference, NEP 2020's emphasis on reading culture, digital education and inclusion pushes it toward digital resource curation and online access, structured reading-promotion

programmes, information literacy instruction appropriate to school-age learners, accessible and multilingual content, and support for project-based and experiential learning. The school librarian, on this evidence, is moving from a custodial position at the edge of the school toward a position embedded in classroom-level teaching and learning.

2. Higher Education Libraries and the AISHE Evidence :

AISHE 2023-24 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2024) records a higher education enrolment of 4.50 crore, up from 3.42 crore in 2014-15, against a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 30.0 per cent. The Gender Parity Index stands at 1.08, with female GER at 31.2 per cent exceeding male GER at 28.9 per cent, and the faculty count stands at 17.32 lakh, of whom 7.78 lakh are women. Against these figures, NEP 2020 sets a 2035 target GER of 50 per cent, a policy objective rather than an achieved outcome, which implies that higher-education enrolment would need to grow by close to two-thirds of its current level within roughly a decade. Figures 3 to 5 present the enrolment growth, gender-parity and faculty-composition patterns underlying these figures.

Indicator (AISHE 2023-24)	Value
Total higher education enrolment	4.50 crore
Enrolment, 2014-15 (comparison)	3.42 crore
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	30.0%
NEP 2035 GER target	50% (target, not achieved)
Gender Parity Index	1.08 (female GER 31.2% / male GER 28.9%)
Total faculty (of which female)	17.32 lakh (7.78 lakh female)

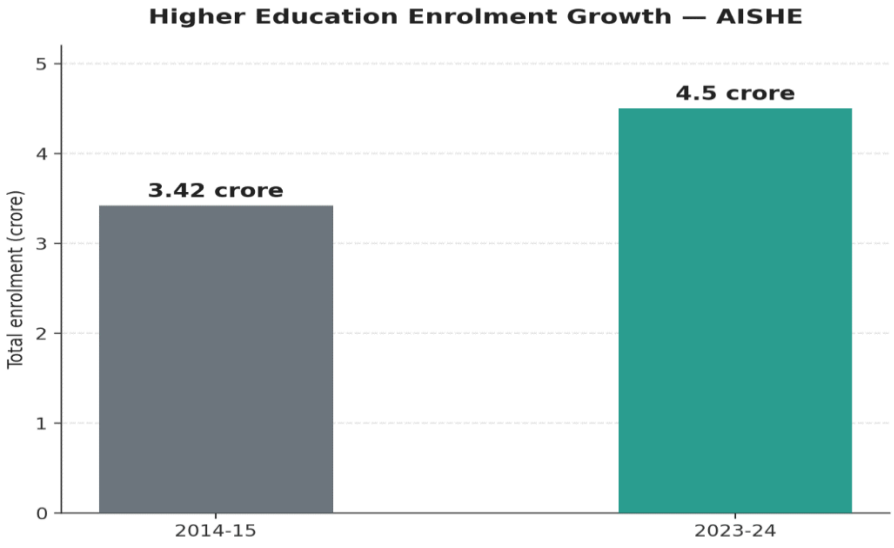


Figure 3: Higher Education Enrolment Growth, AISHE (2014-15 vs 2023-24)

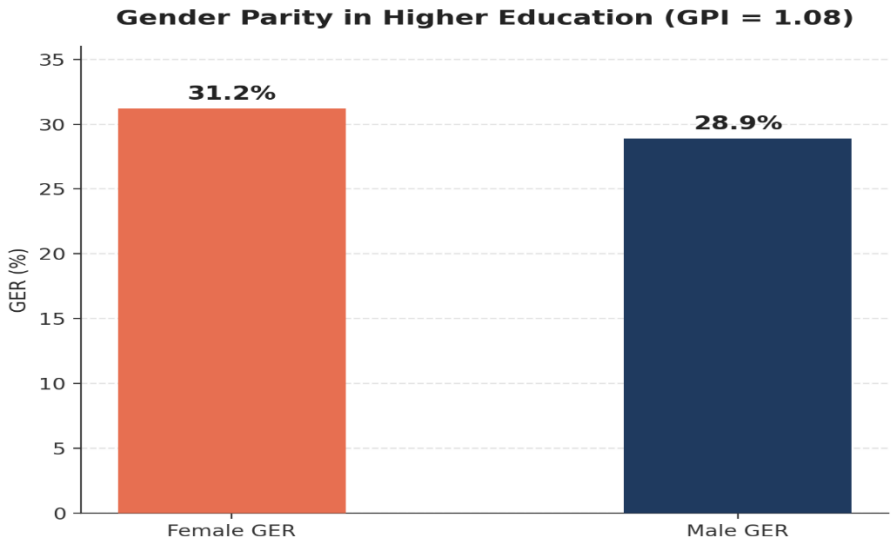


Figure 4: Gender Parity Index in Higher Education, AISHE (2023-24)

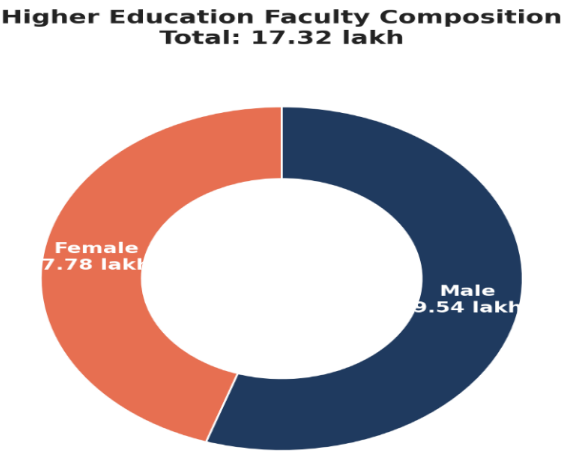


Figure 5: Faculty Composition in Higher Education, AISHE (2023-24)

Reaching the 2035 target implies that academic libraries will need to serve a substantially larger and more heterogeneous student population than they do today, at a time when NEP 2020 is simultaneously introducing multiple entry and exit points, the Academic Bank of Credits, and expanded open and distance learning. Each of these mechanisms weakens the assumption, built into much traditional library planning, that the typical user is a full-time, campus-resident student progressing through a fixed programme. Multidisciplinary education adds a further requirement: collections, discovery systems and research assistance need to span disciplines rather than sit within single-subject silos, and library staff need to be able to support students and researchers moving across fields rather than remaining within

one.

The library response implied by these two forces, scale and flexibility, is consistent across the underlying policy provisions: off-campus and remote access to e-resources with reliable authentication, digital repositories that do not depend on physical presence, remote reference and virtual information-literacy programming, and subject guides and research assistance designed for interdisciplinary rather than single-department use. If learning under NEP 2020 becomes more flexible, library access has to become correspondingly flexible, or the gap between enrolment growth and library capacity will widen rather than close.

3. National Digital Infrastructure: NDLI, ONOS, e-ShodhSindhu and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya :

Since 2022, four national initiatives have substantially increased the volume of digital scholarly and reading material nominally available to Indian students and researchers. INFLIBNET's e-ShodhSindhu consortium provides access to more than 10,000 full-text journal titles and over 1,64,300 e-books to member institutions (INFLIBNET Centre, n.d.). The National Digital Library of India, hosted by IIT Kharagpur, indexes or makes discoverable more than 8 crore digital resources spanning school, higher-education and research material, and organizes NDLI Clubs for digital-literacy outreach (National Digital Library of India, n.d.). One Nation One Subscription, the most recent of the four, aggregates access to more than 13,000 journal titles across 27 subject categories from more than 30 publishers for over 6,500 member institutions (One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), n.d.). Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya, run by the Department of School Education and Literacy, provides reading material in Indian languages and English, across multiple genres and formats including PDF, EPUB, text-to-speech and audiobooks, through partnerships with publishers. Figure 6 compares the scale of these four initiatives on a single, log-scaled chart.

Initiative	**Scale (as reported)**
e-ShodhSindhu (INFLIBNET)	10,000+ full-text journals; 1,64,300+ e-books
National Digital Library of India (NDLI)	8 crore+ digital resources / items indexed
One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)	13,000+ journal titles; 6,500+ institutions; 30+ publishers; 27 subject categories
Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya	Multi-genre content in Indian languages and English; PDF, EPUB, TTS, audiobook formats

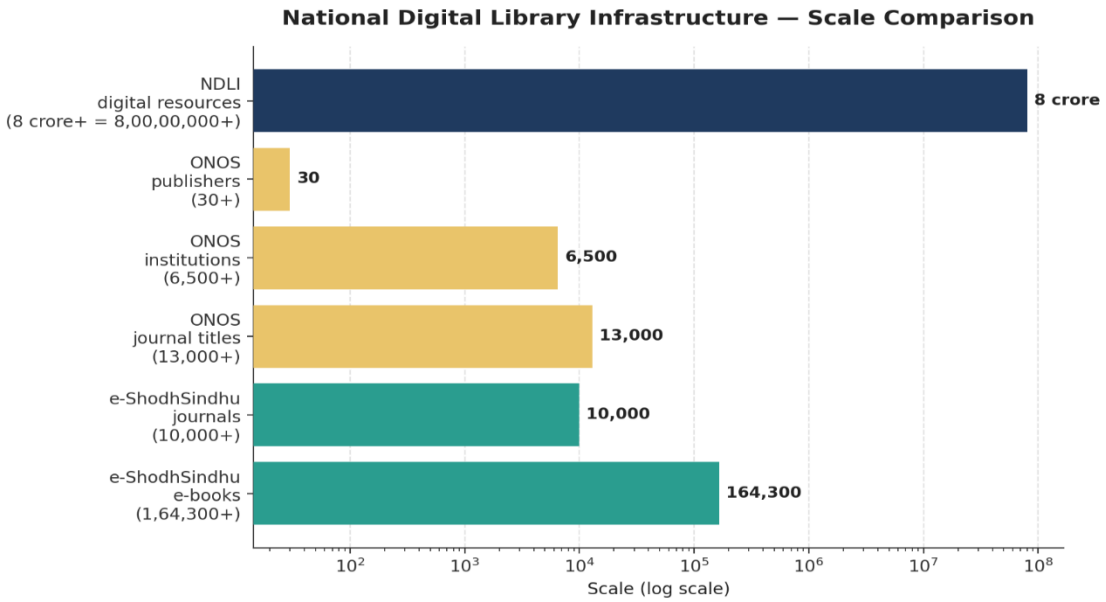


Figure 6: National Digital Library Infrastructure — Scale Comparison (Log Scale)

These initiatives share a common structural feature: they multiply the resources technically available to an institution, but they do not by themselves ensure that students, faculty or researchers know the resources exist, can authenticate into them, or can use them effectively. That mediating function, described in the ONOS documentation itself as encompassing user awareness, resource discovery, authentication support, research assistance, training and usage analysis, falls to LIS professionals. National networking of this kind changes what a library is for: an institution no longer needs to build a self-contained collection to give its users a broad base of scholarly material, but it does need library staff capable of connecting users to a shared national resource base rather than a locally held one.

4. Indian Languages and Indian Knowledge Systems :

NEP 2020's emphasis on Indian languages and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) creates a body of LIS work that has few close precedents in earlier Indian library practice. On the language side, it involves collection development in Indian languages, digitization combined with optical character recognition and handwritten-text recognition for scripts and materials not well served by existing digitization pipelines, multilingual metadata and transliteration to make cross-language discovery possible, translation services, and digital preservation and local-language reference services. A digital library that holds relevant content but cannot be searched or understood in a user's own language provides access in name only; discoverability in the user's language is what converts a digitized collection into a usable one.

On the IKS side, the relevant library functions are the digitization of manuscripts and rare documents, documentation of indigenous, tribal and oral knowledge, collection of local

and oral history, and the application of metadata, indexing and preservation standards that make these materials findable and usable by researchers working from primary sources. This work follows a recognizable sequence: identifying and locating manuscripts and sources, digitizing them to an adequate technical standard, describing them through metadata and indexing, documenting their context and provenance, and preserving the resulting digital objects for long-term access. Each stage requires distinct professional competence, and the sequence as whole positions libraries as one of the few institutional actors capable of converting culturally significant but currently undocumented material into a form that supports NEP 2020's stated interest in Indian Knowledge Systems.

5. Inclusive and Accessible Library Services :

NEP 2020's equity and inclusion commitments carry direct implications for how library services are designed. Meeting them in a library context implies Braille and large-print resources, audiobooks and text-to-speech output, accessible EPUB formats compatible with screen readers, accessible library websites with captioned multimedia, and remote access options for users who cannot attend a physical library in person. The underlying principle is straightforward but easy to violate in practice: digital transformation is only consistent with the policy's equity commitments if it improves accessibility for users with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, rather than introducing a new barrier in the form of formats or interfaces that are less accessible than the physical alternatives they replace.

6. From Librarian to Information Professional: The Changing Scope of LIS Work :

Across the school, higher-education, digital-infrastructure and inclusion findings above, a consistent pattern emerges in how the LIS role itself is changing. The traditional core of the profession, collection management, classification and cataloguing, circulation, and reference service, remains necessary but is no longer sufficient to describe what NEP 2020 asks of library staff. Around this core, the policy's provisions add digital resource management, information-literacy instruction, research support and bibliometrics, institutional repository management, digital preservation and research-data management, and online user training and services.

Research support illustrates this expansion most clearly. Where the traditional academic library role in research was largely limited to acquisition and reference assistance, the functions now expected of a research-active LIS professional span the full research lifecycle: literature searching and support for systematic reviews, bibliometric and scientometric analysis, research-impact assessment, ORCID and researcher-identity management, institutional-repository and research-data management, citation management and scholarly-communication support, and open-access advisory services. This cluster of functions is sufficiently distinct from traditional reference work that it is increasingly described, in both the literature reviewed above and in the source material for this paper, as a shift from librarian to research information specialist rather than as an incremental addition to an existing job description.

Information literacy work has undergone a related shift in emphasis. The earlier question that information literacy instruction addressed, whether relevant information could be found at all, has been substantially answered by the scale of digital access described in Section 5.3. The question that has replaced it is harder: whether the information that can be found is reliable, whether it has been evaluated and cited correctly, and whether it has been used ethically. Meeting this requirement places search-skill instruction alongside source evaluation, fact verification and citation practice, copyright awareness and plagiarism prevention, and broader instruction in research ethics, as core components of an information-literacy programme rather than optional extensions to it.

7. Artificial Intelligence in Library Services :

Artificial intelligence tools are beginning to enter library workflows in a defined set of applications: semantic search and recommendation systems, metadata assistance and OCR, handwritten-text recognition (directly relevant to the IKS digitization work described in Section 5.4), reference assistance and literature discovery, and translation support (relevant to the Indian-language work described in the same section). None of these applications is presented, in either the policy context or the literature, as a replacement for professional judgement. The recurring caveat across the source material and the literature reviewed in Section 3 is that AI-assisted output in a library context requires verification of accuracy and provenance, explicit attention to copyright, privacy and bias, and a retained requirement for human judgement in the professional decisions that AI tools are used to support. This is consistent with the broader literature's finding that AI adoption in libraries remains at an early and cautious stage, constrained more by unresolved questions of reliability and professional readiness than by any shortage of plausible applications.

8. Public Libraries and Lifelong Learning :

Public libraries sit outside the school and higher-education systems covered by UDISE+ and AISHE, but they carry direct responsibility for the lifelong-learning commitment in NEP 2020. The most recent nationally reported figure, drawn from RRRLF data collected in 2018-19 and subsequently reported by the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Culture, Government of India, n.d.), puts the number of public libraries in India at 46,746, unevenly distributed across states: Maharashtra reports 12,191, Kerala 8,415, Karnataka 6,798, West Bengal 5,251, Tamil Nadu 4,622 and Gujarat 3,464. This figure should be read as a description of the public library network as it stood in 2018-19 rather than as a current, 2026 picture; no more recent nationally consolidated count is available in the sources used for this paper, and this absence is itself a finding, discussed further below.

Within the limits of what this dated figure can support, public libraries are positioned by NEP 2020 as centres for reading, informal learning, community engagement and digital inclusion outside the formal education system, serving adult learners, out-of-school populations and communities where school or higher-education library access is weaker. The uneven state-wise distribution visible even in the 2018-19 data suggests that public library

capacity to fulfil this role varies considerably by region, in ways that a national aggregate figure does not capture.

Discussion :

Three patterns recur across the findings in Section 5. The first is a consistent gap between physical and digital provision. School library or reading-corner coverage stands at 89.5 per cent, but dedicated digital library provision stands at only 6.9 per cent; higher-education enrolment has grown steadily, but the GER remains twenty points below the 2035 target; public libraries number in the tens of thousands, but the most recent reliable count is seven years old. In each case, the physical or nominal infrastructure is considerably further advanced than the digital, current or qualitatively adequate version of the same infrastructure. This is consistent with the literature reviewed in Section 3, which repeatedly identifies infrastructure and funding gaps as the primary constraint on NEP 2020's library agenda, rather than any disagreement about what libraries should be doing (Soni, 2023). Figure 7 illustrates the extent of the gap between the current GER and the NEP 2035 target.

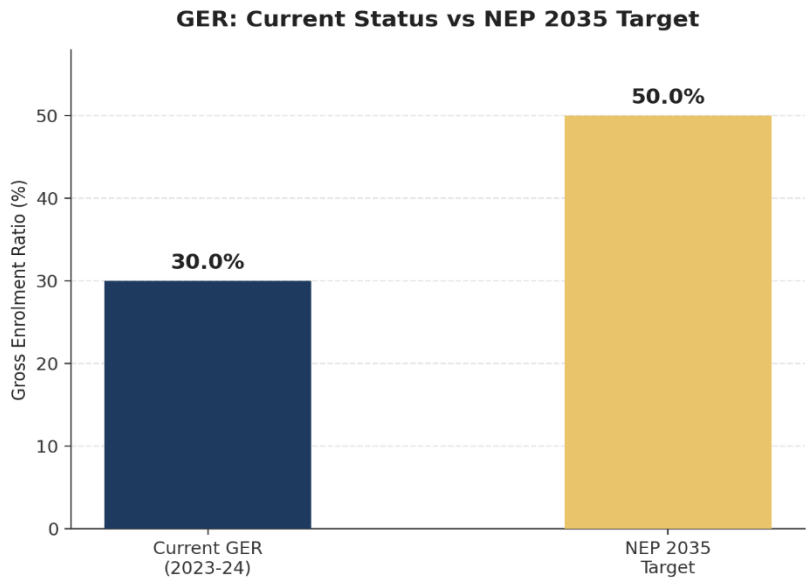


Figure 7: Current (2023-24) vs NEP 2035 Target Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

The second pattern concerns the relationship between access and use. National digital infrastructure, ONOS, NDLI, e-ShodhSindhu and Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya, has expanded the volume of resources technically available to Indian learners at a pace that outstrips the growth of any single institution's own collection. But volume of access is not the same as effective use, and the findings in Section 5.3 show that converting access into use depends on functions, discovery support, authentication management, training and usage analysis, that are professional rather than technical in character. This reframes the library's contribution under NEP 2020: less as a provider of content in its own right, and more as the professional layer that makes a nationally shared resource base usable at the point of need.

The third pattern is a tension between the pace of role expansion and the pace of professional readiness. Sections 5.6 and 5.7 describe an LIS role that now extends into bibliometrics, research-data management, Indian Knowledge Systems documentation and AI-assisted service delivery, well beyond the traditional core of the profession. The literature reviewed in Section 3 shows this expansion occurring faster than the training infrastructure needed to support it, with digital competence and AI literacy repeatedly identified as areas of professional under preparedness (Bolasco, 2023; Khan et al., 2025). The evidence assembled in this paper does not contradict that finding; if anything, the scale of the national digital infrastructure described in Section 5.3, and the specificity of the IKS and multilingual work described in Section 5.4, suggest that the skill demands on LIS professionals are broader than a general reference to digital competence captures.

Read together, these three patterns support the proposition drawn from the literature review in Section 3: NEP 2020 has not left library policy in India conceptually unclear. What it has left underdetermined is implementation, specifically the pace at which digital library infrastructure is built out at the school level, the rate at which academic library capacity scales alongside enrolment growth, the currency of public library data available for planning, and the professional development pipeline needed to equip LIS staff for an expanded scope of work. This is consistent with, and extends, the assessment in the earlier Indian library-policy literature that national library development has proceeded without a fully integrated planning framework (Dasgupta, 2005; Balaji, 2012); NEP 2020 supplies clearer direction than earlier policy did, but direction alone does not resolve the funding, staffing and data gaps this paper documents.

7. A Practical Roadmap for LIS Practice Under NEP 2020 :

Based on the findings and discussion above, seven priority areas summarize where LIS effort under NEP 2020 is most needed.

- Digital library development : close the gap between physical library coverage (89.5% of schools) and digital library provision (6.9%) by building reliable digital access alongside, not instead of, existing physical collections.
- Information literacy : embed structured information-literacy instruction, covering source evaluation, citation, copyright and research ethics, directly into teaching and learning rather than offering it as a stand-alone library service.
- Multilingual resources : strengthen Indian-language collections, metadata, transliteration and discovery so that national digital infrastructure is usable in the languages learners actually work in.
- Research support : build bibliometric, research-data-management and scholarly-communication services that match the expanded research-lifecycle role described in Section 5.6.
- Professional development : establish regular, structured training in digital tools, AI literacy and emerging technologies, addressing the readiness gap identified consistently in the literature.

- Inclusive access : design digital services so that they extend, rather than compromise, accessibility for users with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups.
- Public and community services : strengthen public libraries as centres for reading, lifelong learning and digital inclusion, beginning with an updated, nationally consolidated count to replace the 2018-19 RRRLF figure now in use.

Limitations :

This paper draws on national aggregate datasets, which by design mask state, district and institution-level variation; a school or university close to the national average on any of the indicators used here may still differ substantially from the figure reported for its own state or type of institution. The public library figures rely on RRRLF data collected in 2018-19, which limits their currency, a limitation acknowledged directly wherever these figures are used above. The analysis is descriptive and policy-analytic rather than causal, and does not attempt to isolate the effect of NEP 2020 itself from other concurrent developments in Indian education and digital infrastructure. Finally, the scope of the paper is limited to the Indian policy and institutional context; while parts of the discussion, particularly on AI adoption and digital-competence gaps, draw on international literature, the empirical findings should not be generalized beyond India without further comparative work.

Conclusion :

NEP 2020 does not reduce the importance of libraries in Indian education; it enlarges it, and it does so through provisions, paragraphs 2.8, 21.9 and 21.10 in particular, that are specific enough to function as an operational mandate rather than a general statement of intent. National data broadly support the account of library development that the policy implies: physical library and reading infrastructure is close to universal in Indian schools, higher-education enrolment continues to grow toward the policy's 2035 target, and national digital infrastructure has expanded the scholarly and reading resources nominally available to Indian learners on a scale that would have been difficult to achieve through institution-by-institution collection building.

At the same time, the same data show that the constraint on realising NEP 2020's library agenda is not a lack of conceptual clarity but a lack of implementation capacity: a digital library provision rate in schools an order of magnitude below physical library coverage, a higher-education enrolment ratio still twenty points short of its 2035 target, public library data that has not been nationally refreshed since 2018-19, and a professional development pipeline that the literature consistently finds underprepared for the digital, multilingual, research-support and AI-related demands the policy implies. The library, on this evidence, is no longer usefully described as a place that holds books. It is an educational service whose effectiveness under NEP 2020 depends on sustained investment in digital infrastructure, professional development and coordinated national planning, delivered by LIS professionals whose role has already moved well beyond the custodial function it once was.

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