Assessment of India's New Education Policy 2020 on Skill Development and Graduate Employability

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Education is vital to the development of human potential and to the building of an equal society. But universal access to excellent education has to be expanded to sustain India's economic progress, social fairness and equality. The New Education Policy (NEP) was introduced in 2020 and aimed to develop and revolutionize Indian higher education so that learning is in sync with the skill needs of the twenty-first-century workforce. This is a policy evaluation paper that presents a field study conducted in 2025, five years after the implementation of NEP reforms, offering a multi-stakeholder perspective. The research assessed the perceived impact of the policy on skill development and work preparation using primary data from 122 stakeholders: 56 students, 52 faculty members, and 14 industry recruiters. Data were obtained using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Awareness of the policy was high: 91.1% of students were aware of NEP 2020, and 98.1% of institutions reported official implementation actions. But only 28.6% of students received any formal orientation, and only about half participated in skill development classes. Faculty indicated broad uptake of transdisciplinary education and vocational courses but cited infrastructure, financing and capability as hindrances to implementation. Recruiters ranked graduates' digital literacy and technical knowledge as relatively high, but ranked communication skills and industry exposure as the lowest qualities. Eight of the 14 recruiters said the quality of graduates has neither improved nor worsened since 2020. The results demonstrated an evident disparity between the execution of policy goals and students' experiences, as well as between students' experiences and employers' expectations, and recommended strengthening experiential learning, co-designing curricula with industry, investing in continuous faculty development, and expanding career support services to improve graduate employability.

Keywords: Employability; higher education; India; New Education Policy 2020; skill development

INTRODUCTION

India adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in 2015, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which sought to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. Although India possesses one of the world's youngest workforces, its higher education system continued to face challenges in translating this demographic advantage into gainful employment. Employer surveys consistently reported a mismatch between graduates' skills and industry requirements, with a substantial proportion of graduates inadequately prepared for available jobs (Confederation of Indian Industry, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Rigid curricula, rote learning, and weak industry linkages contributed to the persistent education-to-employment gap in India (Agarwal, 2021). To address these structural challenges, the Union Cabinet approved the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 on 29 July 2020, marking the first comprehensive reform of Indian education since the 1986 New Education Policy (Government of India, 2020). For higher education, the policy introduced four-year multidisciplinary undergraduate programmes with multiple entry and exit options, the Academic Bank of Credits for digital credit storage and transfer, the integration of vocational and skill-based education, and the proposed Higher Education Commission of India as a single regulatory body. It also targeted a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 50% by 2035 and public expenditure on education equivalent to 6% of gross domestic product (Government of India, 2020; Aithal & Aithal, 2020). These reforms marked a shift from degree-oriented education toward competency-based, employment-focused learning (Kumar & Sharma, 2022).

More than five years after its introduction, systematic evidence on the implementation and outcomes of NEP 2020 remained limited. Most published studies were conceptual or relied on document analysis, while few empirical studies examined the perspectives of students, faculty, and employers simultaneously (Pandey & Joshi, 2022). Consequently, whether the policy had improved student learning, transformed institutional teaching practices, and enhanced graduates' workplace readiness remained an open empirical question.

This study addressed these questions using primary survey data collected in 2025 from three stakeholder groups as part of a larger dissertation project. Specifically, the study aimed to (i) assess stakeholder awareness of NEP 2020 and its perceived influence on curricula; (ii) evaluate the availability, content, and perceived effectiveness of skill development initiatives in higher education; (iii) examine students' perceived employment readiness and recruiters' assessments of graduate quality; (iv) identify the challenges associated with implementing skill-based education; and (v) develop actionable recommendations for policymakers, higher education institutions, and industry.

The study contributed to the literature by integrating the perspectives of students, faculty, and recruiters within a single research design, enabling a comprehensive assessment of the alignment between policy objectives and implementation outcomes. This approach identified both convergences and divergences between policy intent and stakeholder experiences. The remainder of the paper reviewed the relevant literature, described the research methodology, presented and discussed the findings for each stakeholder group, and concluded with policy recommendations and directions for future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Indian education policy evolved through three major national policy statements. The New Policy on Education (1968), based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, emphasised equal educational opportunity and a

common school system. The New Education Policy (1986), revised in 1992, prioritised universal access, adult education, and open and distance learning, and led to the establishment of institutions such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University (Government of India, 2020).

NEP 2020 replaced this framework with a holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible approach to education that aimed to foster creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning (Government of India, 2020). Aithal and Aithal (2020) compared the 1986 and 2020 policies and concluded that NEP 2020 introduced a more ambitious restructuring of higher education through greater institutional autonomy, stronger research orientation, and the integration of vocational education.

A substantial body of literature highlighted the need for reform in higher education. Agarwal (2021) argued that outdated curricula and examination-oriented pedagogy had weakened the alignment between higher education and labour market needs. He further contended that India could realise its demographic dividend only by equipping graduates with industry-relevant skills. International studies reached similar conclusions, reporting that educational institutions across South Asia had not adequately developed the socio-emotional, digital, and higher-order cognitive skills demanded by employers (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). The World Economic Forum (2020) identified analytical thinking, active learning, and problem-solving as the most critical future workforce skills, reinforcing the need for curriculum reform.

Several studies examined the skill development framework outlined in the NEP 2020. Kumar and Sharma (2022) argued that the policy's emphasis on vocational education, internships, and the Academic Bank of Credits shifted higher education from a degree-oriented to a competency-based model. Sharma (2021) characterised the policy as a transformative framework for skill development, while Choure and Singh (2023) highlighted its role in integrating vocational education into mainstream higher education to support national self-reliance. Singh and Das (2021) argued that the policy could narrow the education–employment gap if institutions effectively implemented experiential learning rather than treating skill development as a supplementary component. Government initiatives, including the Skill India Mission and model curricula developed by the technical education regulator, further supported these reforms (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2022; National Skill Development Corporation, 2022; AICTE, 2022).

Empirical research on stakeholder perspectives in the Indian higher education context remained limited. Kalyani (2020) reported widespread optimism among students, parents, and teachers regarding NEP 2020 but also identified considerable uncertainty about its implementation. Pandey and Joshi (2022) found that the policy's potential to improve employability depended on faculty preparedness and effective industry engagement. Bhatnagar (2021) argued that a persistent employability skills gap remained in higher education and that policy reforms alone could not address it. Industry reports similarly emphasised the importance of collaboration between higher education institutions and employers to co-develop curricula and expand experiential learning opportunities to improve graduate outcomes (FICCI & EY India, 2020; Ernst & Young, 2021; KPMG, 2020; Deloitte India, 2020).

Institutional preparedness remained a persistent challenge in implementing NEP 2020. Effective implementation required faculty retraining, investment in infrastructure, and greater regulatory flexibility, yet higher education institutions varied considerably in their capacity to meet these requirements (KPMG, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2021). Official data further highlighted the scale of the challenge, with more than 1,000 higher education institutions serving approximately 40 million students (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2021).

Overall, the literature supported the transformative intent of NEP 2020 but identified effective implementation, faculty development,

student awareness, and industry engagement as critical determinants of its success. However, few studies provided primary evidence that simultaneously captured the perspectives of students, faculty, and recruiters. This study addressed that gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine both the extent of NEP 2020 implementation and stakeholders' perceptions of its impact. The study collected primary data through three structured online questionnaires administered using Google Forms. It also collected secondary data from policy documents, government reports, and other relevant publications.

A total of 122 respondents participated in the study across three stakeholder groups. The student sample comprised 56 respondents, primarily enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in economics, management, commerce, engineering, and related disciplines. The faculty sample comprised 52 respondents, including professors, assistant professors, a principal, directors, a former vice-chancellor, and a head of department, representing government, private and autonomous institutions across disciplines such as engineering, agricultural sciences, languages, and social sciences.

The recruiter sample comprised 14 organisations representing the information technology, geospatial services, manufacturing, banking and finance, agriculture, research instrumentation, trading, and educational technology sectors. The study employed purposive sampling to recruit stakeholders directly involved in higher education, skill development, and graduate recruitment, thereby enhancing the relevance of the findings while limiting their statistical generalisability.

The student questionnaire assessed awareness of NEP 2020, participation in skill development courses, industry exposure, career support, and perceived employment readiness. The faculty questionnaire examined familiarity with NEP 2020, institutional implementation measures, adopted policy components, skill development practices, perceived effects on graduate employability, and implementation challenges. The recruiter questionnaire assessed awareness of NEP 2020, perceptions of changes in graduate quality between 2020 and 2024, evaluations of six graduate competencies using a five-point Likert scale, perceived skill gaps, and industry–academia collaboration. All three questionnaires combined closed-ended questions, five-point Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions.

The study tabulated quantitative data in Microsoft Excel and summarised the results using frequencies and percentages. It analysed open-ended responses using thematic content analysis, coding recurring themes into categories such as practical exposure, curriculum alignment, career guidance, and infrastructure. The study then compared findings across the three stakeholder groups to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's academic purpose. The study did not collect or report personal identifiers, and all responses remained confidential. The study had three main limitations. First, the sample comprised only 122 respondents and was skewed toward government institutions, which limited the generalisability of the findings. Second, the online survey administration may have excluded individuals with limited internet access. Third, the cross-sectional design captured stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time. In addition, the analysis excluded one recruiter survey item on annual hiring volumes because respondents interpreted the response scale inconsistently.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the 122 respondents. Among students, 89.3% were enrolled in government institutions, with management and economics accounting for the

largest share of programmes. Among faculty, assistant professors constituted the largest group (67.3%), and 78.8% were employed in government institutions. The recruiter sample represented ten industry sectors. Because most student and faculty respondents were affiliated with government institutions, the findings primarily reflected the public higher education sector.

Insert Table 1 here

Student Perspectives: Awareness and Institutional Engagement

Student awareness of NEP 2020 remained high, but institutional engagement was limited. As shown in Table 2, 91.1% of students reported being aware of the policy or somewhat aware. However, only 28.6% had attended an orientation programme or seminar on NEP 2020, whereas 71.4% had received no formal orientation. Perceptions of curriculum change were similarly mixed. While 48.2% of students believed that NEP 2020 had influenced their curriculum, 35.7% were uncertain, and 16.1% reported no noticeable change.

These findings suggested that students acquired most of their knowledge of NEP 2020 through media coverage and public discourse rather than through structured institutional communication. If institutions had effectively implemented and communicated NEP-driven reforms, a larger proportion of students would likely have received formal orientation and recognised changes in the curriculum. The gap between high policy awareness and limited institutional engagement, therefore, highlighted a critical weakness in policy implementation, consistent with Kalyani's (2020) observation that students received insufficient guidance on how NEP 2020 would affect their academic programmes.

Insert Table 2 here

Student Perspectives: Skill Development Provision

Skill development initiatives reached only about half of the students surveyed. As shown in Table 3, 48.2% of students reported access to skill development or vocational training courses, whereas 51.8% had not received such opportunities. Figure 2 illustrates the skill areas covered by these programmes. Communication skills were the most frequently reported, followed by problem-solving, entrepreneurship, digital skills, and technical skills, whereas critical thinking was not reported by any respondent. Among students who participated in these programmes, 45.5% reported greater confidence in entering the job market, 36.4% remained uncertain, and 18.2% reported no improvement in their employment readiness.

These findings had two important implications. First, students who participated in skill development initiatives generally perceived them as beneficial, indicating that the programmes offered meaningful value. Second, the limited coverage and emphasis on critical thinking suggested that the existing initiatives did not adequately address the competencies required for graduate employability. Skill development, therefore, remained fragmented and inconsistently integrated into the curriculum. This finding aligned with Singh and Das (2021), who cautioned that treating skill development as an add-on rather than embedding it within the curriculum would limit its effectiveness.

Insert Table 3 here

Insert Figure 2 here

Student Perspectives: Employment Confidence and Qualitative Evidence

Student confidence in employment readiness remained modest. Figure 1 presents the distribution of responses. A majority of students (57.1%) reported being neutral, not very confident, or not at all confident about securing employment after graduation, whereas only 12.5% reported being very confident. The qualitative findings reinforced this pattern. Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses identified five recurring challenges: limited practical exposure and real-world experience, with curricula perceived as overly theoretical and outdated; weak alignment between curricula and industry requirements, particularly in areas such as spreadsheets and data analytics, which many

students learned independently; inadequate academic guidance and mentoring; deficiencies in communication and other soft skills; and limited placement opportunities and career counselling.

Student recommendations closely reflected the challenges they identified. The most common suggestions included mandatory internships and industry projects, greater emphasis on practical and job-oriented curricula, structured career guidance and placement support, training in software and data analytics, and increased awareness of NEP 2020. These findings reinforced the recruiter perspectives discussed later, which identified experiential learning as a key constraint on graduate employability (Bhatnagar, 2021).

Insert Figure 1 here

Faculty Perspectives: Implementation, Skill Delivery and Challenges

Faculty awareness of NEP 2020 remained almost universal, and institutions had initiated formal implementation. Of the 52 faculty respondents, 90.4% reported being familiar with the policy's major provisions, while a further 7.7% reported being somewhat familiar. Nearly all respondents (98.1%) indicated that their institutions had taken formal steps to implement NEP 2020. Figure 3 presents the policy components adopted by their institutions. Multidisciplinary education recorded the highest level of adoption (87.8%), followed by skill and vocational education (82.9%), internships and industry exposure (61.0%), and flexible curricula and credit systems (58.5%). In contrast, only 36.6% of respondents reported adopting the Academic Bank of Credits.

This pattern suggested a phased approach to implementation, with institutions initially adopting reforms that aligned with existing academic structures while postponing those requiring substantial systemic change. For example, multidisciplinary education could be introduced through cross-departmental electives, whereas the Academic Bank of Credits required digital infrastructure, standardised credit transfer mechanisms, and inter-institutional coordination, which likely contributed to its slower adoption (Aithal & Aithal, 2020).

Insert Figure 3 here

Table 4 summarises the skill development initiatives integrated into institutional curricula and the mechanisms used to deliver them. Soft skills were the most frequently adopted initiative (63.5%), followed by technical skills (51.9%), entrepreneurship (44.2%), digital and information technology skills (38.5%), and financial literacy (26.9%). Institutions most commonly delivered these initiatives through workshops and seminars (67.3%) and by embedding skill development within core courses (59.6%). In contrast, only 32.7% offered standalone certificate programmes, and just 25.0% reported industry partnerships. These findings indicated that institutions continued to rely heavily on workshops despite increasing curriculum integration, suggesting that skill development had not yet been fully embedded within academic programmes. The limited use of industry partnerships was particularly noteworthy because recruiters consistently identified inadequate industry exposure as a major constraint on graduate employability.

Insert Table 4 here

Most faculty believed that NEP 2020 initiatives had improved students' employment prospects, yet they also identified substantial implementation challenges. Table 5 summarised the five themes that emerged from the thematic analysis: infrastructural constraints, including inadequate technical facilities and learning environments; financial constraints, including the high cost of skilled personnel and the need for greater funding, particularly for rural institutions; faculty-related challenges, including shortages of trained staff and the need for continuous professional development; student-related challenges, including low engagement, weak foundational knowledge, and socio-economic barriers; and governance and implementation challenges, including gaps between policy objectives and implementation, limited institutional autonomy, and low awareness

among students, parents, and the wider community.

The coexistence of positive perceptions of employability outcomes and persistent implementation challenges suggested that faculty supported the principles of skill-based education but questioned whether institutions possessed sufficient resources and capacity to implement the reforms effectively.

Insert Table 5 here

Recruiter Perspectives: Graduate Quality, Skill Gaps and Collaboration

Recruiter responses provided an external assessment of the effects of NEP 2020. Table 6 summarises their responses. Awareness of the policy remained high: 10 of the 14 organisations reported being aware of NEP 2020, while two reported being somewhat aware. Perceptions of its impact, however, were more mixed. Seven organisations believed that the policy had positively influenced university education, four observed no noticeable effect, and two remained uncertain. Assessments of graduate quality between 2020 and 2024 were similarly cautious. Five organisations reported improvements, six observed no substantial change, two reported a decline, and one remained undecided. Overall, eight of the 14 recruiters reported either no improvement or a deterioration in graduate quality following the introduction of NEP 2020, suggesting that policy implementation had not yet translated into consistent, observable improvements in graduate outcomes.

Insert Table 6 here

Figure 4 presents recruiters' average ratings of six graduate competencies on a five-point scale. Digital literacy (3.8) and technical and domain knowledge (3.6) received the highest ratings, followed by problem-solving and collaboration (3.1) and adaptability and willingness to learn (3.0). These results suggested that graduates had developed basic technical competencies more successfully than the higher-order cognitive and interpersonal skills required in dynamic workplaces.

Figure 5 summarises the competencies recruiters identified as most lacking. Communication skills and industry exposure or internships were the most frequently cited deficiencies, with seven mentions each. Work ethic and responsibility, business or entrepreneurial thinking, and critical thinking and technical proficiency each received four mentions. Recruiters also highlighted concerns about discipline, impatience, unrealistic career expectations, and weak subject knowledge. Collectively, these findings indicated that graduate employability depended not only on technical skills but also on professional attitudes, workplace readiness, and experiential learning.

Insert Figure 4 here

Insert Figure 5 here

Although the recruiter sample was relatively small, clear sectoral differences emerged. Recruiters from the banking and finance sector assigned the lowest overall skill ratings and reported a decline in graduate quality. They identified deficiencies in work ethic, business acumen, and sector-specific competencies. In contrast, recruiters from the information technology and data science sectors rated graduates highly in technical and digital skills but reported deficiencies in critical thinking, work ethic, and commercial awareness. These findings suggested that employer expectations in technology-intensive sectors had extended beyond technical competence to include broader cognitive, professional, and business-related capabilities.

Patterns of industry–academia collaboration suggested an underutilised opportunity to strengthen graduate employability. Six of the 14 organisations had partnered with higher education institutions during the previous two years, whereas eight had not. However, 10 organisations expressed willingness to collaborate in the future. The combination of limited internship opportunities, strong industry interest, and relatively low levels of existing collaboration suggested that weak industry–academia partnerships resulted less from a lack of willingness than from the absence of structured collaboration frameworks, unclear mutual

incentives, and administrative barriers (FICCI & EY India, 2020).

Cross-Stakeholder Synthesis

Table 7 synthesised the perspectives of the three stakeholder groups. Three areas of convergence emerged. First, all stakeholders identified experiential learning and stronger industry engagement as essential for improving graduate employability. Faculty advocated greater industry participation in curriculum design, recruiters emphasised practical work experience, and students called for more internships and industry visits. Second, all groups recognised the importance of soft skills, particularly communication. However, recruiters continued to identify communication as one of the most deficient graduate competencies, highlighting a persistent gap between skills training and workplace expectations. Third, stakeholders consistently identified resource and capacity constraints, ranging from inadequate infrastructure and funding reported by faculty to limited placement support reported by students.

The differences across stakeholder groups were equally informative. Although institutions reported nearly universal formal adoption of NEP 2020, only about half of the students perceived curriculum changes, and most recruiters observed little or no improvement in graduate quality. Students who participated in skill development programmes generally viewed them as beneficial, yet recruiters indicated that graduates still lacked several essential competencies. Similarly, although these programmes improved participants' confidence, this did not translate into broader confidence in employment readiness because access to internships and placement support remained limited. Collectively, these findings revealed three distinct gaps: an implementation gap between formal policy adoption and student experience; an effectiveness gap between the provision of skill development initiatives and the competencies graduates acquired; and a transition gap between academic completion and successful entry into the labour market.

Insert Table 7 here

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the impact of NEP 2020 on skill development and employment readiness in Indian higher education using primary evidence from students, faculty, and recruiters. The findings indicated that NEP 2020 had made substantial progress in initiating institutional reform. Awareness of the policy remained high across all stakeholder groups, institutions had formally begun implementation, and multidisciplinary education and vocational programmes had been widely adopted. However, the policy's transformative potential had not yet been fully realised. Only about half of the surveyed students reported access to skill development initiatives, critical thinking received little emphasis within these programmes, the adoption of the Academic Bank of Credits remained limited, and most recruiters observed little or no improvement in graduate quality after 2020. The consistent emphasis on practical experience across all stakeholder groups identified experiential learning as the principal constraint on improving graduate employability.

The findings led to four sets of recommendations. First, policymakers should support the implementation of NEP 2020 by increasing investment in infrastructure and skill development centres, particularly in rural institutions, expanding academic and financial autonomy, and establishing monitoring systems that evaluate graduate employability rather than merely tracking policy adoption. Second, higher education institutions should integrate mandatory, credit-bearing internships, industry projects, and real-world case studies into academic programmes; invest in continuous faculty development and industry immersion; establish industry advisory boards to co-develop curricula; and strengthen career development centres that provide career counselling, résumé preparation, and placement support. Third, industry partners should move beyond advisory roles by co-designing curricula and assessments, offering structured internship programmes, and engaging regularly with institutions through guest lectures, mentoring, industrial visits, and collaborative projects. Finally, students should

actively participate in skill development opportunities within and beyond the curriculum and make effective use of institutional career support services to enhance their employability.

The study had several limitations that suggested directions for future research. The study used purposive sampling and included 122 respondents from predominantly government higher education institutions in a single region, which limited the generalisability of the findings. Its cross-sectional design also prevented the assessment of changes over time. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track student cohorts throughout the four-year undergraduate programme, use larger multi-state samples that include private institutions, and employ quantitative methods to examine the relationship between specific NEP 2020 components and measurable employment outcomes. Sector-specific studies, particularly in banking and finance, where recruiters reported substantial skill deficits, could provide more targeted policy and curriculum recommendations. As NEP 2020 implementation progressed, the focus of future research and policy evaluation shifted from documenting institutional adoption to assessing whether the reforms produced measurable improvements in graduate competencies and employability.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Stakeholder group	Category	n	Percent
Students (n = 56)	Male	40	71.4
	Female	16	28.6
	Government institution	50	89.3
	Private institution	4	7.1
	Autonomous institution	2	3.6
Faculty (n = 52)	Assistant & Associate Professor	35	67.3
	Professor	11	21.2
	Director and Other senior roles	6	11.5
	Government institution	41	78.8
	Private and Autonomous institution	11	21.2
Recruiters (n = 14)	IT, geospatial and data science	5	35.7
	Banking and finance	2	14.3
	Agriculture and agritech	3	21.4
	Manufacturing, trading and other	4	28.6

Table 1 Profile of respondents. Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Recruiter sectors are grouped for presentation.

Table 2 Student awareness of and institutional engagement with NEP 2020 (n = 56)

Item	Response	n	Percent
Aware of NEP 2020	Yes or somewhat	51	91.1
	No	5	8.9
	Yes	16	28.6

Received orientation or seminar on NEP 2020	No	40	71.4
NEP 2020 has changed my academic curriculum	Yes	27	48.2
	Not sure	20	35.7
	No	9	16.1

Source: Authors' survey data (2025).

Table 3 Availability and perceived effect of skill development programmes (students)

Item	Response	n	Percent
Offered skill development or vocational courses	Yes	27	48.2
	No	29	51.8
Programmes improved confidence in the job market (base = 44)	Yes	20	45.5
	Not sure	16	36.4
	No	8	18.2

Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Confidence item answered by students exposed to programmes.

Table 4 Skill initiatives integrated into curricula and delivery methods (faculty)

Skill initiative or delivery method (n = 52)	n	Percent
Soft skills (communication, teamwork)	33	63.5
Technical skills	27	51.9
Entrepreneurship	23	44.2
Digital and IT skills	20	38.5
Financial literacy	14	26.9
Delivered through workshops and seminars	35	67.3
Embedded in core courses	31	59.6
Separate skill certificate programmes	17	32.7
Industry partnerships	13	25.0

Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Multiple responses permitted.

Table 5: Faculty-reported challenges in implementing skill-based programmes

Challenge category	Illustrative issues reported by faculty
Infrastructural deficiencies	Unsuitable ecosystem for skill curricula; shortage of technical instruments; limited physical resources
Financial constraints	Inadequate budgets; high cost of expert personnel; calls for larger allocations to rural institutions
Faculty-related issues	Shortage of trained teachers, scarce domain experts, need for faculty reorientation and time management

Student-related issues	Low student interest and participation; weak foundational knowledge; socio-economic barriers for rural and poor students
Coordination and policy enactment	Weak stakeholder coordination; mismatch between policy vision and ground reality; limited institutional autonomy; low awareness among students, parents and society

Source: Thematic analysis of open-ended faculty responses, authors' survey data (2025).

Table 6 Recruiter perceptions of NEP 2020 and graduate quality

Item (n = 14)	**Response**	**n**
Aware of NEP 2020	Yes	10
	Somewhat	2
	No	2
NEP 2020 has influenced university preparation	Yes	7
	No	4
	Not sure	2
Observed change in graduate quality, 2020-2024	Positive	5
	No major change	6
	Negative	2
	Not sure	1
Collaborated with institutions over the last two years	Yes	6
	No	8
Open to future collaboration	Yes	10
	No	4

Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Totals may differ from 14 where an item was not answered.

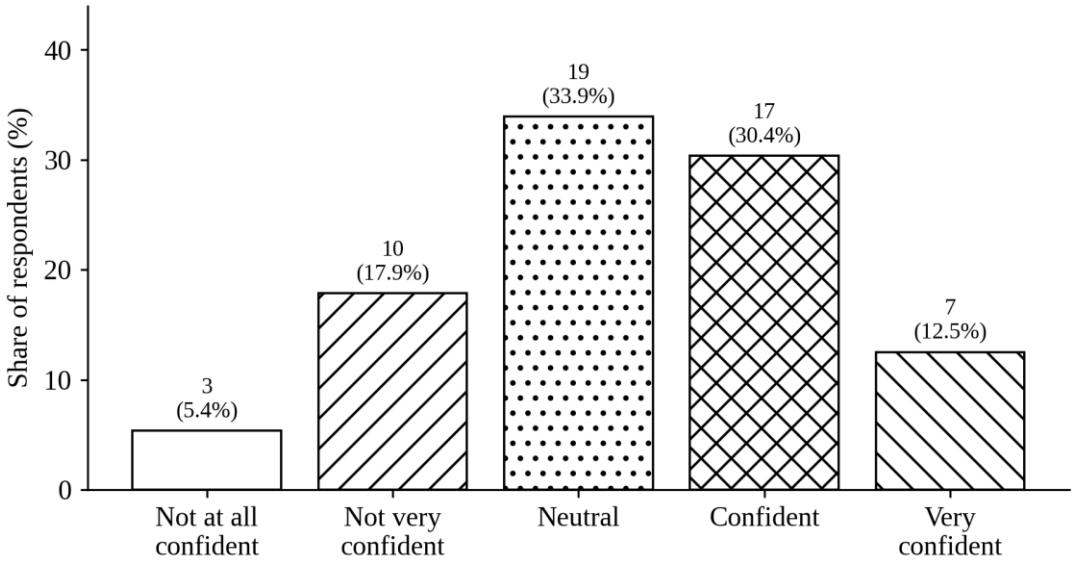
Table 7: Convergences and gaps across the three stakeholder groups

Dimension	**Cross-stakeholder pattern**
Convergence	All groups demand practical, experiential learning and stronger industry linkage; all groups recognise soft skill efforts, especially communication; all groups report resource and support constraints
Implementation gap	98.1 per cent of institutions report formal NEP steps, but only 48.2 per cent of students perceive curricular change, and 28.6 per cent received orientation
Efficacy gap	Skill courses are adopted widely and rated useful by students, yet recruiters still rank communication and industry exposure as the most deficient graduate attributes

Last mile gap	Confidence gains from skill programmes do not become overall employment confidence; 57.1 per cent of students are neutral or lacking confidence, reflecting inconsistent internships, counselling and placement support

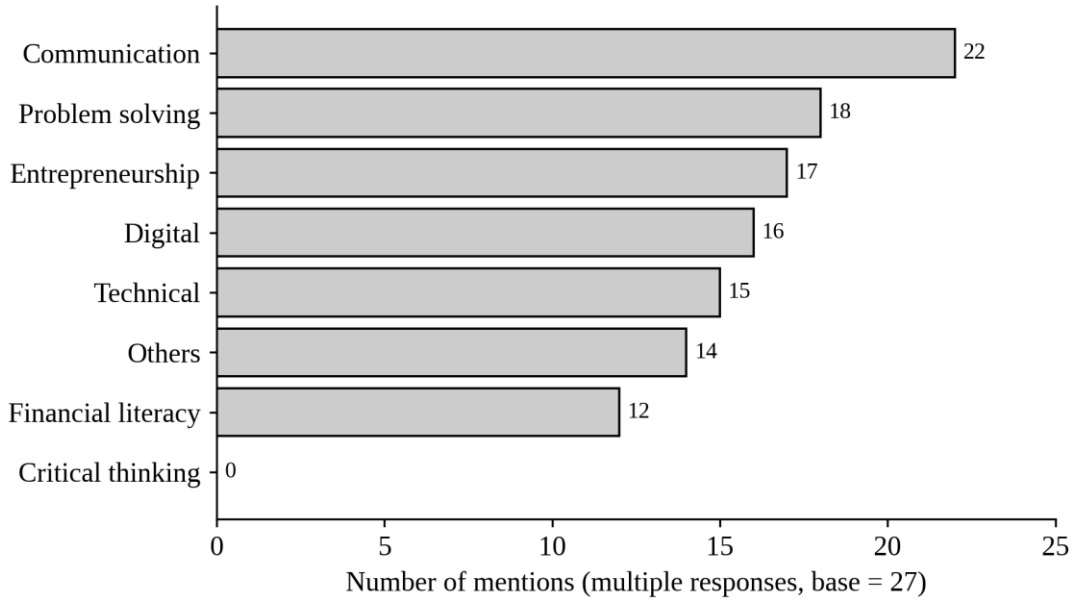
Source: Authors' synthesis of survey data (2025).

Figure 1 Student confidence in securing a job after graduation (n = 56)



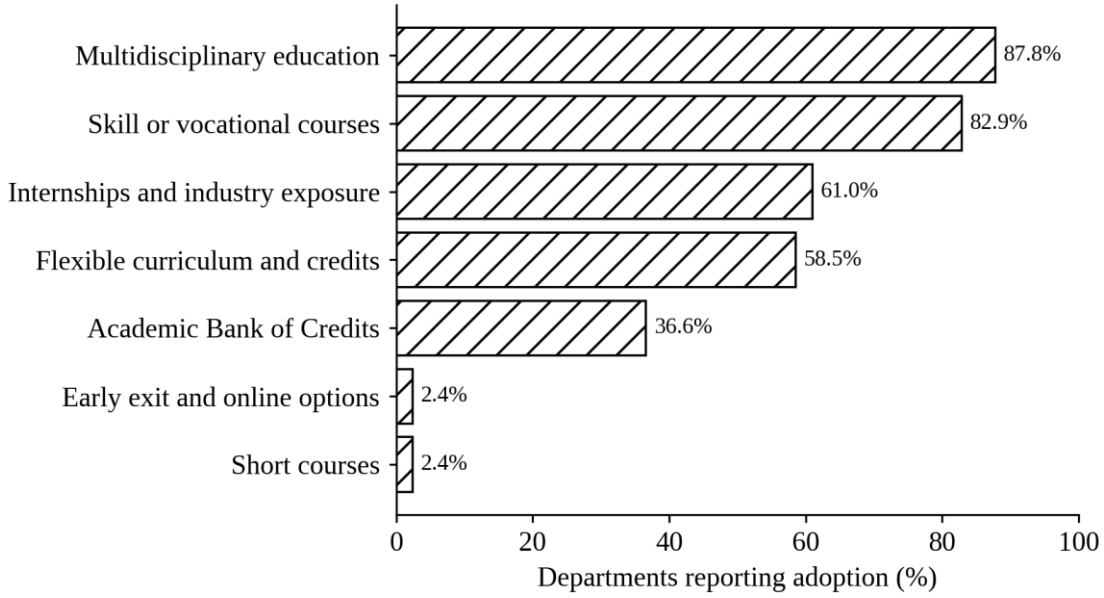
Source: Authors' survey data (2025).

Figure 2 Skill areas covered in programmes offered to students (multiple responses, base = 27)



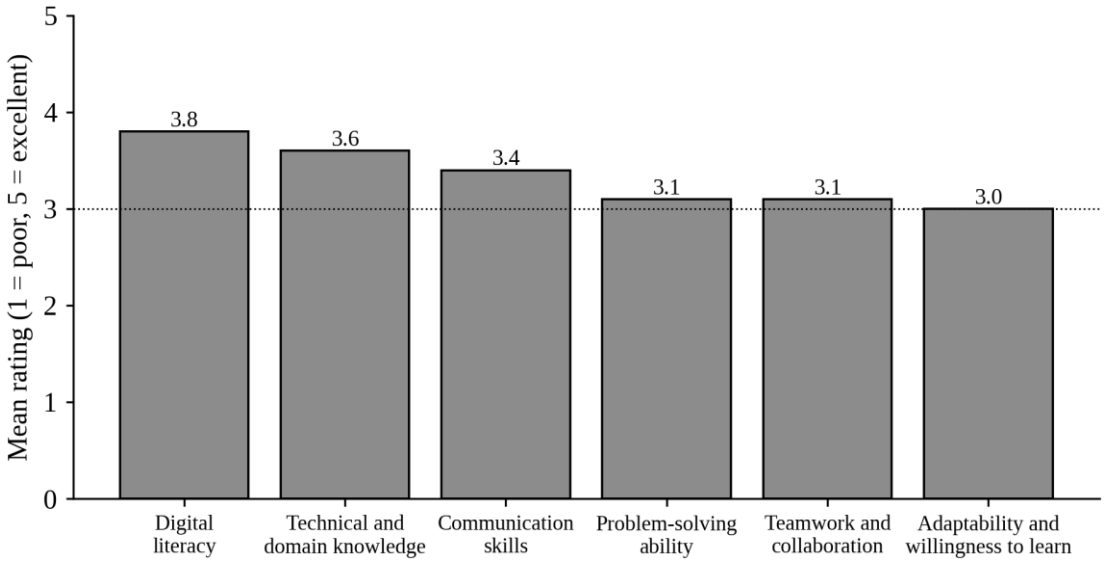
Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Critical thinking recorded no mentions.

Figure 3 NEP 2020 components adopted by academic departments (faculty responses)



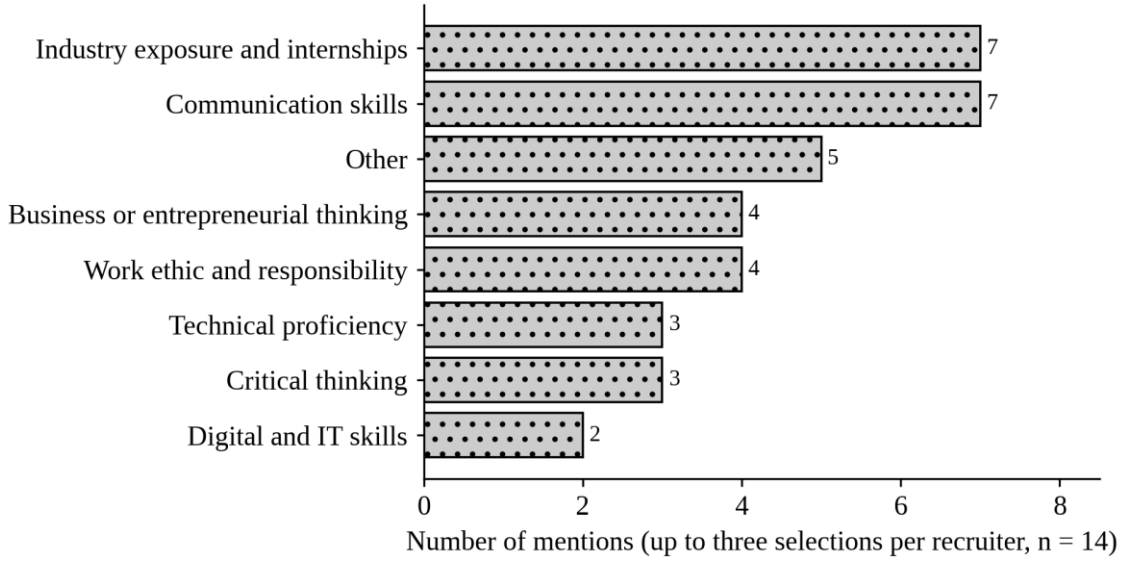
Source: Authors' survey data (2025). Multiple responses permitted.

Figure 4 Recruiter mean ratings of fresh graduate skills (n = 14)



Source: Authors' survey data (2025). The dotted line marks the midpoint of the scale.

Figure 5: Skills recruiters find most lacking in fresh graduates (n = 14)



Source: Authors' survey data (2025)—up to three selections per recruiter.