

Professionalisation of Non-Teaching Staff for Institutional Readiness in Indian HEIs - Strategic Enabler of NEP 2020 Implementation

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Abstract

India's mission of Viksit Bharat @2047 has education at its centre stage for national development. In this context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, brings the much-expected transformational shift in the Indian Higher Education system - the blueprint to modernize the Indian education system in a systemic and holistic manner. The transformation focuses on a wide spectrum of reforms to be brought in governance, curriculum, institutional autonomy, etc however its successful implementation rests fundamentally on the strength and preparedness of its human capital – academic leaders, and non-teaching personnel across the entire education system. While most of the focus articulates structural, pedagogical, and regulatory reforms, placing teachers at the centre of the educational reform as highly qualified professionals. In this initiative, the policy includes, mandatory Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Merit-based recruitment, career progression opportunities, increased autonomy to foster an experiential learning and inculcating research environment.

Often, the role of Non-Teaching (NT) staff in HEIs is overlooked. There are limitations at policy-level to conceptualize NT staff as the strategic partners in this holistic exercise and connect to the long-term national development goals which are envisaged through NEP 2020 and towards the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047.

With this context, the study aims to analyse the administrative capabilities in Indian HEIs i.e, whether the NT staff are being evolved to meet new challenges, professionalising key functions like, academic administration, student support, placements, alumni relations, accreditations, etc., which are essential for an institution to get aligned with NEP 2020 requirements.

The study is based on analysis of documents like, NEP 2020, AISHE reports, and NIRF data, academic research papers, etc. The NEP 2020 has still not prioritised HR policies for NT staff. While administration is merely seen a support function to manage academic workforce, it is important to address these gaps to develop a comprehensive framework of policies and strategic practices to acknowledge the knowledge, skill and contributions of the NT staff to be treated as professionals.

From the research, it is evident that HEIs can succeed only through the synergetic efforts of both faculty and NT staff. A well-structured support system can enhance institutional efficiency; improve student outcomes, and create more experiential learning centres. The leadership positions, such as Registrar, Dean-Administration, Finance Officer etc require professional and strategic skills for the governance of HEIs. However, at times even these senior positions as well most of the lower-level administrative staff are employed on contractual basis. For good governance and to traverse long-term goals, to foster responsibility and efficiency, HEIs need to promote NT staff as new-age professionals specialising in various domains of academic administration such as, Library information system, Information Technology, Research project management, strategic Human Resource management, Regulatory Compliances, Accreditations and rankings, etc. The non-teaching function is not merely to be seen as a supporting variable but as Strategic Enabler for NEP 2020 implementation, calling for professionalising administrative function for Institutional Readiness in Indian HEIs.

The paper contributes a conceptual peek that links NEP 2020 reforms to achieve excellence in Indian HEIs offering critical implications for policy design, institutional strategy, and research in the context of the imperative need for Professionalisation of Non-Teaching staff.

Key words: National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Academic Administration, Non-teaching staff, Indian Higher Education Institutes.

1. Introduction

Under the National Education Policy 2020, teacher education occupies a pivotal and transformative position creating the foundation to redefine quality, professionalism, and preparedness of educators in the Indian education system. The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is one such pronounced approach recommended under this policy in the area of teacher education. The administration of academic institutions remains largely dominated by academicians. The professionalisation of non-teaching staff remains nascent, focused on Leadership Development.

In comparison, internationally particularly in the UK, Europe, and Australia, the professionalisation of non-teaching staff in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), has emerged as a pivotal response to market-driven governance, worldwide massification or rapid expansion of access to education to large numbers, digital transformation, etc. The so-called administrative support staff / non-teaching staff have now navigated their new roles in the advanced countries that blur traditional academic-administrative boundaries. These new ‘third space’ roles are associated with research management, teaching assistance, student success, quality assurance, rankings & accreditations, institutional strategies etc. Internationally, this shift has been well documented as seen in the literatures, where the professionalisation of non-teaching staff is having a more matured approach providing long-term career, hybrid identities, and recognition of ‘third-space’ roles in HEIs.

In Indian HEIs however, the policies on professionalisation of non-teaching public administrative staff are at a very nascent stage and are lacking attention in NEP 2020. The professional development in academic institutions is still overwhelmingly being implemented as faculty-centric programmes, with very little attention in respect of administrative staff like that of library or lab technicians. Hence NEP 2020 is being observed with limited references about inclusion, governance, or continuous professional development and learning for non-teaching staff.

2. Review of Literature

From the review of existing literature, it is highlighted that in all HEIs, the non-teaching staff are categorised differently as administrative, non-technical, technical or support staff. Some of the studies in international context indicate linkages of institutional efficiency to competencies, service roles and achievement of organizational balance by non-teaching staff.

The findings by (Ryttberg & Geschwind, 2021) based on study of the support staff of a Dutch and a Norwegian university indicated that there is no ‘one size fits all solution’ for organising of efficient support. The staff perceive that the organisation is a balancing act between the academic and support staff. Another study by (Phan et al., 2025) developed and validated the Service Competency of Non-Academic Staff (NONACA-SERCOM) in their three dimensions comprising of interpersonal, self-management and professional competencies. The work identified the key competencies required for the support staff, forming the backbone of administrative functions to deliver service to students and other stakeholders.

(Matlakala & Bezuidenhout, 2024) in their study found gap in the identification of training needs of administrative staff to enhance the organisational performance of universities. The findings promote talent development for staff and new ways of working on talent management practices to maximise organisational excellence. (Garaba, 2022) studied perceptions of non-teaching staff regarding the service delivery and training aspects in Tanzania’s education system showing that many schools lack adequate non-teaching staff and provide limited training

opportunities, thereby the need for greater commitment from policymakers to prioritize capacity-building for non-teaching personnel.

Role of non-teaching staff in supporting academic, technical operations, and professional development is essential for institutional sustainability. They are as much crucial as the teaching fraternity in the academics (A. Antiado et al., 2020). (Barreto, 2020)highlighted that non-teaching staff provide essential services such as counselling, library management, hostel and food services, facility maintenance, procurement, and policy support. The effectiveness of these services addresses institutional challenges. (Mapa, 2026)emphasised that non-teaching staff are as critical as teachers in the smooth functioning and stability of educational institutions. There is need for targeted capacity-building programs for non-teaching personnel for enhancing employee performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment

While in the available literature in context of Indian HEIs, most of the studies are dominantly overfocusing on faculty/academic staff development and there is very limited emphasis on institutional readiness, quality enhancement, training needs, or capacity building of administrative staff.

(Kataria & Rajput, 2025) identified the challenges and the key enablers for service quality including students, faculty and staff members. They proposed a comprehensive framework for improvement including competencies of support staff to align towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal.

The positive impact of Human Resource Development (HRD) policies and procedures in enhancing the professional and personal growth of non-teaching employees and academicians at Banaras Hindi University has been highlighted in the paper (Kumar et al., 2020). A case study by (H. M. Azad, 2025) conducted in academic institutions in Uttarakhand, indicated varying measures of the job satisfaction across administrative support and technical staff.

There is ample literature that indicate that the teaching quality in Indian higher education is affected due to non-academic responsibilities of teachers. Studies in the Mangalore University region suggest that HEIs and regulators need policies to balance academic and non-academic duties to maintain teaching quality and enhance student competencies and long-term productivity. (Kulal et al., 2023). Teachers are imposed with administrative work, admission and many other duties and responsibilities. (Naga Subramani P.C. & Iyappan V., 2018). Further, (Pandit, 2025) in his study has categorically indicated that the non-academic staff are crucial in implementing NEP 2020 and professionalising the institutions to international standards. The importance of imparting technical skills, digital technologies to existing staff and recruiting of professionals are some of the key recommendations. (Asgar, 2020) identified the non-teaching employees' training needs at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), that can guide such initiatives in other institutions.

Research paper by (Dwivedi & Vig, 2023) attempted to study the future challenges for educational institutes with particular reference to blockchain technology. While it is observed that blockchain imbibes efficiency and transparency in working systems, the preparedness of the support staff for adopting these technologies, to take the role as IT enablers in Indian HEIs is in a nascent stage. The study (Bokil et al., 2023) of growing concern of employability of engineering graduates indicated a skill gap between the practical requirements of the industry, particularly IT, and the competencies of the non-teaching university staff.

(Khanikar & Jain, 2018) examined the professional skills and training needs of non-teaching staff in selected HEIs in Assam which inferred a strong need for training to improve professional competencies. A study that examined stress management among teaching and non-teaching staff in different education institute of Ghaziabad city revealed the outcome that relative to teachers, the non-teaching staff had higher mean score on stress management (Verma & Kumar, 2014).

3. Problem Statement and Objective of the study

Non-teaching staff constitute a critical component of the academic ecosystem. They are accountable for carrying out several administrative services for faculty, staff, the community, students, and any other stakeholders, for the smooth running of the educational institutes. There is little importance assigned to this group as staff generally lag behind in professional development compared to teaching counterparts.

The significant objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To assess the current level of professionalism, skills, and competencies among non-teaching staff in Indian HEIs.
2. To examine the alignment of administrative capabilities with professional development initiatives for non-teaching staff in Indian HEIs, with the vision and future requirements of the NEP 2020.
3. To identify gaps, barriers, and enablers in professionalisation of non-teaching staff functions in Indian HEIs.
4. To propose policy recommendations aimed to enhance institutional readiness through the development of capable non-teaching staff in HEIs.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design with an interpretive approach to examine the professionalisation and evolving role of the non-teaching staff in HEIs.



The analysis is descriptive in nature and is primarily based on secondary data including policy documents like, NEP 2020, AISHE reports, and Manuals of bodies such as, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the University Grants Commission of India (UGC), etc.

The findings infer that professionalism extends beyond workforce adequacy and should be viewed as a comprehensive framework of policies and practices that foster competency building of non-teaching staff, administrative effectiveness and achievement of institutional efficiency.

5. Dimensions of the Study

The NEP discusses faculty development extensively while the provisions related to the professional development of non-teaching staff are relatively unexplored. However, some of emerging policies highlight training, professional growth, and capacity building of the key administrative personnel.

(A) Institutional Governance

NEP-2020 stresses strengthening institutional governance and management in HEIs. For this, the administrative capacity must shift from the conventional clerical support towards professional academic management. HEIs should strengthen managerial and specialist roles in areas such as academic planning, research administration, digital systems, accreditation, and student services. Creating professional administrative career tracks will enhance institutional efficiency and allow faculty to focus on teaching and research.

(B) Capacity Building

The administrative and support staff must be professionally trained to improve efficiency and institutional functioning. Their efficiency can be optimised by regular professional development programmes for administrative personnel, providing training in various aspects of administration, and institutional management. Introduction of professional courses required for academic administration of modern HEIs similar to the disciplines of Hotel or, Hospital Management. Development of framework for upskilling non-teaching professionals (e.g., via professional doctorates, for roles in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)/Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), research incubation, or digital learning.

(C) Organisational Leadership and Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices

AISHE classifies non-teaching staff into four groups viz., Group A, B, C and D. Group A represent the senior cadre of Registrars, Finance Officers, Librarians etc and other group staff B, C and D are categorised as supervisory, clerical and support staff, respectively. The number of group-wise non-teaching staff indicate a proportion of 30% in Group A and B, while about 70% are in Group C and D. The disproportion indicates limited availability of managerial and strategic administrative leadership in HEIs which bring limitations in academic administration, governance reforms, financial and research administration. This is a major concern under NEP 2020 which envisions professionally managed institutions.

Leadership development must therefore prioritise training in governance, financial management, project management etc. NEP-2020 advocates a culture of continuous professional development for all educational personnel, which may include administrative/non-teaching staff, through structured training programmes, workshops, and institutional capacity-building initiatives.

Human Resource Management remains underdeveloped in majority of HEIs. A plan of training programmes for upgradation of skills or knowledge of the employees is most neglected in many of the organizations. Institutional policies are required to be formulated such that employees of one institute may be trained in another institute in the selected areas or for the best practices, which would be beneficial for the professional growth. In this way, it will ultimately lead to the overall professional development and will significantly impact effective disposal of the official working.

6. Major Recommendations

Based on these few identified gaps in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the following policy level key implications are inferred for HEIs:

Policy/ Body	Reference	Focus on non- teaching staff.	Implication for non-teaching staff in HEIs.
NEP 2020	Higher Education: CPD for Faculty (section 15.10)	Encourages continuous professional development (CPD), and institutional governance.	While HEIs being faculty-focused, the principle of CPD may also extend to administrative staff for capacity building programs and skill upgradation in governance, digital management, student support services, etc. to be conducted.
UGC	Administrative Capacity Building guidelines	Recommends skill enhancement for administrative efficiency which includes digital skills, office automation, and governance training for administrative staff.	Implementation of Institutional-level training programs covering ERP management, financial processes, examination, administration, and governance procedures.
AICTE	Accreditation and Governance Manuals	Emphasizes efficiency in administration for accreditation and quality assurance. These indirectly refer to the professionalism of non-teaching staff.	Training in accreditation processes, ERP systems, academic administration, quality compliance, etc.
NIRF	NIRF ranking Metrics like Institutional Perception, Governance, Student Support, Resource Management	Indirectly emphasise effectiveness of administration	Strengthen capacity building for accurate reporting of various parameters aligned with the ranking criteria.

7. Summary and Conclusion

Recent initiatives have been taken up for capacity building of non-teaching staff under the flagship Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme (MMTTP) by conducting short duration training programmes tailored for administrative functions in HEIs. In addition, several various training programmes on emerging technologies including use of AI, data-driven decision making, higher education ecosystem (NEP 2020 overview, NAAC/NBA accreditation, NIRF, administrative procedures (admissions, examinations, UGC regulations, CCS rules, Samarth Portal), Reservation in Services, pensions, leave rules (FR&SR), finance and procurement (General Financial Rules (GFR), GeM, budgeting, PFMS, contract management and purchase of services), Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Right to Information etc. have been introduced for UGC employees. The Mission Karmayogi initiatives support the government's initiative for skill enhancement of government employees. Supplementary tools include Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) for strengthening governance.

From these, it is evident that attention has been recently drawn to the contributions of the non-teaching staff that the higher education institutions in India are navigating the evolving demands of governance, quality, digitalization, etc., wherein their role has emerged as critical in ensuring operational efficiency.

This research paper establishes that professionalization of non-teaching staff, is not merely desirable but imperative for achieving institutional readiness in Indian HEIs, as this segment acts as a strategic enabler of NEP 2020 implementation. By systematically embedding professionalism within non-teaching functions, institutions can effectively bridge gaps in capabilities, skills, and knowledge. This calls for a more inclusive institutional ecosystem, where the non-teaching staff work in close synergy with academicians/faculty members, enabling cohesive governance and institutional functioning. Such integration strengthens administrative resilience, enhances governance efficiency, and equips the HEIs to advance towards the vision of NEP 2020 in a more integrated, inclusive, and outcome-driven manner.

8. Scope for Future Research

Future research could study the evolving role and contribution of non-teaching staff in academic ecosystems. The scope of research can include competency frameworks, the career progression, and the transition to academic work employment.

There is scope of research to bridge the gap for the non-academic staff to make transition to the third space connecting with academicians. The potential mobility of non-teaching staff into teaching or academic support roles or vice-versa can be a good research topic as they will evolve to be narrower and holistic, in future. Additionally, empirical investigations into the impact of administrative professionalism on institutional performance would provide valuable insights.

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