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## FROM DISCIPLINARY SILOS TO HOLISTIC LEARNING: A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CBCS AND NEP 2020 CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS IN MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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*Dr. David Rosangliana<sup>\*1</sup> & Dr. Rosy Lalrinsangi<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>*Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, Government Zirtiri Residential Science  
College, Durtlang, Mizoram, India.*

<sup>2</sup>*Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government T. Romana College, Aizawl,  
Mizoram, India.*

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Article Received: 24 February 2026

\*Corresponding Author: Dr. David Rosangliana

Article Revised: 14 March 2026

Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, Government Zirtiri Residential  
Science College, Durtlang, Mizoram, India.

Published on: 03 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.8522>

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### ABSTRACT

The Indian higher education system is in the midst of a monumental transformation, pivoting from a decades-old structure towards a future-oriented model envisioned in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This transition represents a paradigm shift that goes beyond mere curricular tweaking. This paper presents a detailed comparative analysis of the previously operational Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) and the newly implemented NEP 2020 curriculum at Mizoram University (MZU). Through a meticulous examination of MZU's official documents—the "MZU UG CBCS Regulation" and the "Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUGP) incorporating NEP 2020 Recommendations"—this study deciphers the philosophical, structural, pedagogical, and operational dimensions of this change. The analysis establishes that while the CBCS was a significant reform that introduced elements of choice and standardization, it remained confined within rigid disciplinary boundaries. In stark contrast, the NEP framework is a radical reconstruction of undergraduate education, characterized by its emphasis on holistic and multidisciplinary education, the revolutionary Multiple Entry and Exit Options (MEES), deep integration of vocational skills and value-based education, and the formalization of a four-year undergraduate programme with embedded research. This paper argues that the transition from CBCS to NEP at Mizoram University marks a decisive evolution from a subject-centric, instruction-based model to a student-centric, flexible, and integrated

ecosystem designed to foster critical thinking, enhance employability, and cultivate holistic, socially responsible graduates. The study also critically examines the significant implementation challenges, including infrastructural demands, faculty readiness, and administrative complexities, that MZU must navigate to realize the full potential of this ambitious policy shift.

**KEYWORDS:** NEP 2020, CBCS, Mizoram University, Undergraduate Education, Multiple Entry and Exit (MEES), Multidisciplinary Education, Holistic Education, Curriculum Reform, Indian Higher Education, Graduate Attributes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Indian higher education has been a subject of continuous reform, aiming to align with national developmental goals and global benchmarks. The University Grants Commission (UGC), as the apex regulatory body, has initiated several measures to infuse equity, efficiency, and excellence into the system. A pivotal step in this journey was the promotion of the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) in the 2010s. Conceived as an academic reform to enhance student mobility and provide flexibility, CBCS aimed to move away from a rigid, marks-oriented examination system towards a more dynamic, learner-centric approach (UGC, 2015). Mizoram University, a central university in Northeast India, adopted this framework, as detailed in its "Regulations Governing the Choice-Based Credit and Grading System in Under Graduate Programmes," to foster interdisciplinary learning and a standardized grading mechanism (MZU, CBCS Regulation, Preamble).

However, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, a landmark document, identified the limitations of existing structures and called for a more profound, systemic transformation to meet the demands of the 21st century. It envisions an education system that nurtures "good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals" by developing their cognitive, social, ethical, and emotional capacities in an integrated manner (NEP, 2020, p. 5; MZU, CCFUGP, p. 7). In a direct response to this national directive, Mizoram University formulated and approved its new "Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUGP)" in June 2023, explicitly incorporating the recommendations of NEP 2020 (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 6).

This research article conducts a critical, in-depth comparative analysis of these two distinct yet sequential frameworks—the CBCS and the NEP-aligned CCFUGP—as implemented at

Mizoram University. By dissecting their foundational philosophies, structural architectures, pedagogical imperatives, and intended socio-educational outcomes, this study aims to document and analyze this critical transition in a specific institutional context. The research questions guiding this analysis are: How does the NEP framework fundamentally differ from the CBCS in its philosophical underpinnings? What are the key structural and curricular innovations introduced by the NEP model? What are the potential implications and formidable challenges for an institution like Mizoram University in transitioning from one system to the other? In addressing these questions, this paper contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on educational policy implementation in India, particularly within the unique socio-cultural context of its northeastern region.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The discourse on higher education reform in India is vast and multifaceted. Scholars like Tilak (2021) and Altbach (2014) have long argued that the Indian system, while massive, has suffered from deep-seated issues of rote learning, rigid disciplinary silos, and a disconnect with the skill requirements of the economy. The introduction of the CBCS was widely seen as a positive step towards addressing some of these issues. Research by Chandra (2019) and Rani (2018) highlighted CBCS's role in promoting student choice, facilitating a graded evaluation system through SGPA and CGPA, and enabling limited interdisciplinary exposure through elective courses.

However, critical analyses by Kumar (2017) and Powar (2012) pointed out its limitations. They argued that CBCS, in practice, often failed to break down disciplinary barriers. The 'choice' was frequently constrained within pre-packaged subject combinations, and the system did little to integrate crucial elements like vocational training, soft skills, and value education into the core curriculum. The structure remained largely focused on domain knowledge acquisition, what Barnett (2000) would term "operational knowledge," without sufficiently fostering critical thinking or "ontological transformation."

The NEP 2020 emerges from a different theoretical foundation, drawing from global educational philosophies that emphasize holistic development (Dewey, 1938), constructivist learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and the integration of knowledge (Morin, 1999). The policy's emphasis on multidisciplinary aligns with Morin's concept of "complex thought," which argues for the necessity of connecting disparate fields to understand the contemporary world. The focus on critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills resonates with the

objectives of "liberal education" models prevalent in American universities (Nussbaum, 2010). Furthermore, the MEES system finds its rationale in the philosophy of lifelong learning (Faure et al., 1972) and the need for flexible learning pathways in a rapidly changing job market (World Bank, 2019).

Scholars like Ghosh (2020) and Jena (2020) have hailed NEP 2020 as a transformative policy. Kaul (2021) emphasizes its potential to create holistic individuals, while Sahni (2021) focuses on its employability agenda. However, critics like Tilak (2021) and Desai (2022) have raised concerns about its implementation, including the financial burden on institutions, the challenge of faculty development, and the potential for the MEES system to lead to fragmentation and high dropout rates if not managed carefully. This paper situates the case study of Mizoram University within this vibrant academic debate, using institutional documents as primary data to ground the theoretical discourse in practical reality.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative comparative policy analysis methodology. The primary data sources are the two official documents issued by Mizoram University:

1. Regulations Governing the Choice-Based Credit and Grading System in Under Graduate Programmes (Constituent and Affiliated Colleges) (hereafter "CBCS Regulation").
2. Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (incorporating NEP 2020 Recommendations), June 2023 (hereafter "NEP CCFUGP").

A systematic content analysis was conducted on both documents. The analysis focused on extracting and comparing data across the following thematic categories:

- Philosophical Foundations and Stated Objectives
- Programme Structure and Duration
- Credit Framework and Requirements
- Curricular Components and Course Typology
- Flexibility and Student Choice Mechanisms
- Assessment and Grading Systems
- Integration of Skills, Values, and Research
- Stated Implementation Challenges and Provisions

The findings from this document analysis are triangulated with the secondary literature on higher education reform in India to provide context, validate observations, and draw broader implications. This approach allows for a robust, evidence-based comparison of the two curricular frameworks as conceived and codified by the university.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis: Deconstructing the Frameworks**

##### **4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings and Core Objectives**

The fundamental difference between the two systems lies in their core philosophy.

##### **The CBCS Framework: Flexibility within Boundaries**

The CBCS at MZU was fundamentally an exercise in introducing managed flexibility within a traditional, discipline-oriented system. Its objectives, as stated in the regulation, were to "promote learner centeredness," "encourage inter-disciplinarity," and "improve employability among students" (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 1). The metaphor of a 'cafeteria' was used, suggesting that students could choose from a fixed menu. However, the philosophy was additive rather than integrative. The goal was not to fundamentally reshape the nature of learning but to add options within the existing structure. The focus remained overwhelmingly on the transmission of domain-specific knowledge, with "Core Courses" treated as 'Honours' (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 3), underscoring a deep specialization model.

##### **The NEP 2020 Framework: Holistic and Integrated Development**

The NEP framework is philosophically rooted in the concept of holistic and multidisciplinary education. It explicitly aims to develop "all capacities of human beings – intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional, ethical, and moral – in an integrated manner" (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 7). This is a far more ambitious goal, moving beyond knowledge acquisition to the development of the complete person. The policy critiques the "heritage of a fragmented, hierarchical education system" and seeks to break down the "rigid separation of disciplines" (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 7). The objective is to create graduates who are not just specialists in a field but also critical thinkers, effective communicators, ethically grounded citizens, and adaptable professionals. This is encapsulated in the detailed "Graduate Attributes" provided in Appendix A of the CCFUGP, which includes complex problem-solving, creativity, multicultural competence, and environmental awareness (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 37-42).

## 4.2 Structural Architecture: Rigidity vs. Fluid Pathways

The philosophical differences manifest starkly in the structural design of the programmes.

### **CBCS: The Linear, 3-Year Lockstep Model**

The CBCS framework at MZU was a rigid, 3-year, 6-semester programme with a fixed credit requirement of 140 credits (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 2). A student's path was largely determined at the point of admission by selecting one of the pre-approved subject combinations (e.g., for B.A., English Core with Education and Sociology Electives; for B.Sc., Physics Core with Mathematics and Chemistry Electives) (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 4, Table 2 & 3). There was no concept of a 'Minor'; students studied three subjects for the first four semesters, only declaring a single 'Major Core' for specialization in the final year. The structure offered no formal exit points or re-entry options. A student who left after one or two years had no formal qualification to show for their efforts.

### **NEP CCFUGP: The Flexible, Multi-Track Ecosystem**

The NEP structure is defined by its fluidity and student agency.

**Multiple Durations and Exits:** It offers a 4-year undergraduate programme as the "preferred option," alongside the 3-year degree, introducing a Multiple Entry and Exit System (MEES). This allows students to:

- Exit after 1 year (2 semesters) with a UG Certificate (40 credits + 4 vocational credits).
- Exit after 2 years (4 semesters) with a UG Diploma (80 credits + 4 vocational credits).
- Exit after 3 years with a Bachelor's Degree (120 credits).
- Complete a 4-year Bachelor's Degree (Honours) (160 credits).
- Complete a 4-year Bachelor's Degree (Honours with Research) (160 credits, including a 12-credit dissertation) (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 9-10).
- Dynamic Academic Pathways: The system allows for a change of Major within a broad discipline at the end of the first year, with a provision for 10% additional seats to facilitate this (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 18). This acknowledges that students' interests may evolve after initial exposure.

## 4.3 Curricular Components: From Subject-Centric to Student-Centric Tapestry

This is perhaps the most visually distinguishable difference between the two frameworks, as illustrated in their respective credit distribution tables.

### **CBCS: A Tripartite, Discipline-Heavy Model**

The CBCS curriculum was composed of three components, with a heavy emphasis on disciplinary knowledge:

**Foundation Courses (FC - 20 Credits):** Primarily involved language courses (English, MIL) and mandatory courses like Environmental Studies and History of Science.

**Major Core Courses (CC - 72 Credits):** The main honours subject.

**Elective Core Courses (EC - 48 Credits):** Two other subsidiary subjects.

Total: 140 Credits, with 120 Credits (85.7%) dedicated purely to disciplinary studies (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 2, Table 1).

The curriculum was siloed, with limited scope for integrating different forms of knowledge.

### **NEP CCFUGP: A Rich, Multifaceted Mosaic**

The NEP curriculum is a complex, integrated mosaic designed to provide a broad-based education. For a 4-year degree (160 credits), the distribution is:

**Major Stream (80 Credits):** In-depth study of the primary discipline.

**Minor Stream (32 Credits):** Structured study of a second discipline to provide breadth.

**Multidisciplinary Courses (9 Credits):** Three courses from broad areas outside the Major and Minor (e.g., a Science student taking a course in Humanities or Commerce).

**Ability Enhancement Courses (8 Credits):** Focused on language and communication skills in English and a Modern Indian Language (MIL).

**Skill Enhancement Courses (9 Credits):** Aimed at imparting practical, employable, and soft skills.

**Value-Added Courses (8 Credits):** Mandatory common courses on Universal Human Values, Understanding India, Environmental Science/Education, and Health & Wellness.

**Internship/Apprenticeship/Field Project (2-4 Credits):** Practical community or industry engagement.

**Research Project/Dissertation (12 Credits):** For the 4-year Honours with Research degree.

**Total:** 160 Credits, with only 80 Credits (50%) dedicated to the Major, and the other 50% dedicated to broadening intellectual horizons, building skills, and inculcating values (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 11, 22, Table 1 & 3a).

This structure explicitly mandates that a science student engages with the humanities, a commerce student understands environmental science, and every student reflects on human values and Indian constitutional ideals.

#### **4.4 Pedagogical and Assessment Shifts**

While both systems employ a similar 25% internal assessment and 75% end-semester examination split, the nature of what is assessed has changed significantly.

##### **CBCS: Standardized Theory and Practical Assessment**

The CBCS assessment was tailored for a theory-and-practical model. The internal assessment for theory was based on class tests, assignments, and attendance. Practical courses were evaluated internally for the first four semesters and through external examiners for the final year, focusing on laboratory performance, records, and viva-voce (MZU, CBCS Regulation, p. 9-11). The model was effective for assessing domain knowledge but less so for higher-order skills.

##### **NEP CCFUGP: Diversified and Outcome-Based Evaluation**

The NEP framework, by introducing diverse curricular components, necessitates diversified assessment strategies. While it retains the 25:75 split, it provides detailed rubrics for evaluating non-traditional components. For instance, the evaluation of the Research Project/Dissertation (12 credits) is based on a sophisticated rubric that includes criteria like "originality and relevance," "methodology," "discussion of findings," "contribution to knowledge," and "viva-voce," carrying a total of 75 marks (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 31-32, Table 11). This shifts the focus from content reproduction to knowledge creation and critical analysis. The assessment of internships and field projects would logically involve reflective reports and supervisor evaluations, moving beyond pen-and-paper tests.

## **5. DISCUSSION: Implications and Challenges for Mizoram University**

The transition from CBCS to NEP is a systemic overhaul with profound implications for MZU, presenting both tremendous opportunities and formidable challenges.

### **5.1 Potential Impacts and Opportunities**

**Enhanced Graduate Employability and Versatility:** The blend of a Major, a Minor, Skill Enhancement Courses, and mandatory internships creates "T-shaped" graduates—individuals with deep expertise in one area (the vertical bar of the T) and broad collaborative skills and

understanding across disciplines (the horizontal bar). This profile is highly valued in the modern workforce (World Bank, 2019).

**Reduction in Educational Wastage:** The MEES system is a powerful tool for educational inclusion. It provides a safety net for students who cannot complete a full degree due to financial constraints, personal reasons, or academic disinterest, allowing them to exit with a certified qualification. This can significantly reduce the rate of students dropping out with nothing to show for their time and investment (Varghese, 2020).

**Fostering a Research and Innovation Culture:** The 4-year Honours with Research degree has the potential to fundamentally alter the academic culture at the undergraduate level. By involving students in research projects early, it can cultivate a spirit of inquiry, critical thinking, and innovation, creating a stronger pipeline for postgraduate research and knowledge-driven entrepreneurship (Prakash, 2021).

**Creation of Holistic and Socially Responsible Citizens:** The mandatory Value-Added Courses on Universal Human Values, Understanding India, and Environmental Education directly address the need for value-based education. This aims to produce graduates who are not only skilled professionals but also ethically grounded, environmentally conscious, and active citizens who cherish their constitutional values (Nussbaum, 2010).

## 5.2 Critical Implementation Challenges

**Infrastructural and Faculty Capacity Building:** The success of the NEP framework is contingent on massive capacity building. Offering high-quality Multidisciplinary, Skill, and Value-Added courses requires:

**Versatile Faculty:** Teachers must be trained to design and deliver interdisciplinary courses to students from diverse academic backgrounds. A physics teacher may need to offer a course on "Science and Society" for humanities students.

**Physical Infrastructure:** Skill courses in areas like Artificial Intelligence, Data Analysis, and Drone Technology require state-of-the-art computer labs and software. Departments offering the 4-year research degree must have adequate laboratory facilities and at least two recognized PhD supervisors, a requirement explicitly mentioned in the CCFUGP (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 10).

**Administrative Overhaul and Complexity:** The administrative burden increases exponentially. Creating a timetable where hundreds of students can choose from a common pool of Minor and Multidisciplinary courses without clashes is a monumental task. MZU's CCFUGP suggests a class plan where specific periods are allotted for Minor and MDC courses (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 27), but operationalizing this across affiliated colleges will be challenging. The management of the MEES system, including credit bank, re-entry protocols, and certification, requires a robust and agile administrative IT system.

**Student Guidance and Mentorship:** The "paradox of choice" is a real risk. Without proper guidance, students may feel overwhelmed by the options and make sub-optimal choices. The appointment of Departmental Coordinators, as proposed by MZU (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 36), is crucial. These coordinators must be trained to act as academic mentors, helping students navigate their pathways and align their choices with their career aspirations and strengths.

**Phased Implementation and Resource Allocation:** MZU has adopted a pragmatic approach by initially launching only the "Single Major with Minor" model, deferring the more complex Double Major and full Interdisciplinary programmes for a phased implementation (MZU, CCFUGP, p. 9). This is a wise strategy. However, it requires careful planning and sustained financial investment from both the university and the central government to ensure that subsequent phases are rolled out effectively. The risk of policy failure is high if the implementation is under-resourced (Tilak, 2021).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis undertaken in this paper unequivocally demonstrates that the transition from the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 framework at Mizoram University is not a mere incremental update but a foundational paradigm shift. The CBCS, for all its merits in introducing choice and a standardized grading system, was ultimately a reform within the confines of a traditional, discipline-siloed model of education. It was a system designed for knowledge transmission within predefined boundaries.

In stark contrast, the NEP-aligned CCFUGP represents a radical reconstruction of the very purpose and practice of undergraduate education. It is a future-oriented, student-centric ecosystem engineered for holistic development. Its core innovations—the fluid Multiple Entry and Exit Options, the rigorous multidisciplinary curriculum, the deep integration of

skills, values, and research, and the explicit aim of fostering "graduate attributes" beyond academic knowledge—collectively signal a move towards creating agile, thoughtful, and responsible individuals prepared for the complexities of the 21st century.

For Mizoram University, this transition is a bold and commendable step towards aligning with national educational aspirations and global best practices. It presents an unprecedented opportunity to redefine its role as an institution that not only produces graduates but also cultivates citizens and innovators. However, the journey from policy document to lived reality is fraught with challenges. The university's success will hinge on its ability to navigate the significant infrastructural, human resource, and administrative hurdles detailed in this study. Strategic planning, sustained financial investment, continuous faculty development, and the creation of a robust student support system will be the critical determinants of this policy's success.

The case of Mizoram University serves as a critical microcosm of the larger Indian higher education transformation. Its experiences, both successes and stumbling blocks, will provide invaluable insights for other universities across the country embarking on a similar journey. The ultimate measure of success will be whether this new framework truly empowers the youth of Mizoram and India to not only build successful careers but also to lead fulfilling lives and contribute meaningfully to a just, inclusive, and knowledge-driven society.

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